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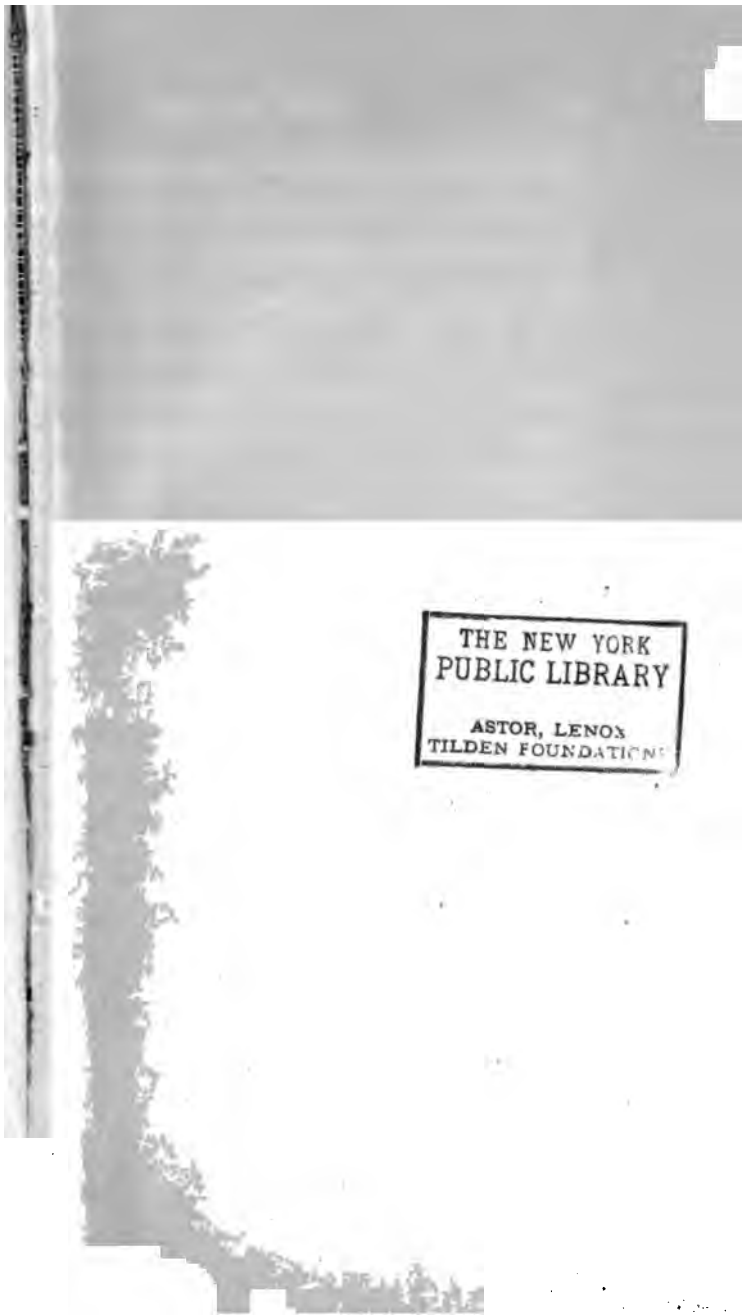

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BY

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I

THE curious thing was that, as babies, the twins had been so alike that even their mother had needed the pink and blue bows to distinguish them; and family tales lingered of a double feeding for Sylvia while Diantha went without, and of Diantha dosed for Sylvia's ailment. Indeed, later, Diantha would sometimes with grim naughtiness assert that they had been mixed and that she was really Sylvia, arousing a fine storm; for Sylvia did not want to be Diantha.

As tiny girls running about they were still perplexingly alike, fairy children of a delicate and haunting beauty that seemed to go down through their baby surfaces to their lovely little bones, and to promise brilliant futures. And then, out of sev-

eral half ailing years and a long, vague illness, the blight had fallen on Diantha. While Sylvia unfolded like a Glory of Rosamund, superfine and glowing, Diantha turned dingy and square, with dull locks and a round, dark face that stared back like a stolid Eskimo's from the nursery mirror. Her mother assured her that it made no difference how a little girl looked so long as she was good—this being the period when the thumping parental lie was still in force in the best homes. Diantha daily saw the whole world paying homage to Sylvia, strangers exclaiming over her, friends and relatives proud of her favor; and yet her faith in her mother was not wrecked—any more than the unmasking of Santa Claus had cost her her belief in her father. Children are less logical than educators. She merely decided within herself that there were things mothers did not understand and took pains to crawl under the guest-room sofa the next time she had to cry for her lost kingdom.

The twins had been born into affluence, which lasted until babyhood was well past. Then the

father died, and gradually the old house looked down upon the river with less of stateliness, as the paint faded and the veranda railings grew unsteady. The conservatories vanished, the stables were nailed up, the windows slowly shed their lace and satin and velvet; a trolley whirred past the gates; and, at last, tracts of lawn and shrubbery were lopped off on either side for shining Colonial or blue brick Elizabethan mansions, put up by no one knew whom. And yet the old place was not always sad. In the spring, with the syringa out, and the half acre or so of veranda hung with wistaria, and the lilac hedge a glory of plumes, it had a charm that made its trim, correct, expensive neighbors seem banal.

It was perhaps because the twins' birthday happened at this season that this one festival had never been allowed to lapse. The new neighbors were not asked, but carriages and motors came from up and down the river and over from the Sound, and far into the night the brave old polished floors reflected the feet of dancers dancing in tune. The

maids next door gathered at the lilac hedge, and the young man of the blue brick Elizabethan house strolled that way with pipe and dog until a glimpse of the group from the kitchen sent him strolling off in the other direction. Humbler neighbors loitered at the gates, and passing trolleys caught a whiff of romance from the lanterns and the massed vehicles and the mingled breaths of summer and violins.

The big house gradually grew quiet. Sylvia went drowsily up to bed while the last motor was still spattering the gravel of the drive, but Diantha and her mother stayed down to make one room habitable for the next day, realizing that the servants would be as tired as the family, and freer in the matter of leaving. Mrs. Brooke, still pleasantly excited, was dwelling in the reflected glory of Sylvia's inevitable triumph. She was a pretty little woman, innocently romantic, and in the years since her husband's death she had unconsciously taken Diantha into a sort of partnership, as though they shared equally the pride and wonder of Sylvia.

"I still think she might have asked that young

man next door," she rambled on, gathering up handfuls of scattered rose petals. "He apologized so nicely about his dog—and all the time he could n't take his eyes off her, poor fellow. Though she certainly did n't need any more men. Does it ever occur to you, Di, how dull we shall be when one of them carries her off?"

Diantha smiled, a wise, dry little smile, not without sweetness. "No danger just yet," she said, bringing back an armchair to its corner with a vigorous push. "So long as Sylvy holds out for high character, brains, charm, family and a comfortable fortune, we are likely to keep her, Mother dear. Now had n't you better go to bed?"

"We must both go." Mrs. Brooke straightened up with a sudden realization of fatigue. "Dear me, Di, I hope you are not going to pay for this to-morrow. You have had so many attacks this year."

Diantha was apt to turn irritable when her unsound health was alluded to. She felt something like a man's shame of infirmity—"a strapping great

thing like me!" as she expressed it. "I am all right," she said, with a shortness that closed the topic. Mrs. Brooke wandered back to the happy theme of her other daughter:

"Of course, Sylvia has a right to the best; but do you know, Di, I should n't be surprised if in the end she settled down to Conrad? He is always there; and I, for one, should be quite satisfied. Brilliant marriages are not necessarily the happiest."

Diantha, who was locking a window, paused a moment with upraised arm, her forehead touching the glass. Then she closed the blinds with a brisk bang.

"Yes, Conrad is always there," she said clearly. "Good night, Mother. I 'll turn this out when you are up."

She waited below until the reluctant closing of a door showed that her mother had given up hope of further conversation. The girl felt herself immeasurably the older, just then. An elderly neighbor had tried to tease her that night with a record of the birthday parties:

"There have been twenty-six, Di. I have been to them all, and I know."

"Oh, yes, we 're fifty-two between us," Diantha had cheerfully admitted. "Sylvia 's the two and I 'm the fifty."

She had had a good time, as such things went. For the first few hours, the brightness and gaiety, the cordial eyes and hands of old friends, the security of abundant partners, had given her an excited sense of being actively in the center of life instead of obscurely planted on its outside edge. But no doubt she had worked too hard beforehand, for presently her spirits began to drag. As the gaiety of the night grew, hers dropped away. After all, it was Sylvia's party: Diantha was only among those present. There was not one least drop of jealousy in her thoughts: she was honestly glad of every brilliant moment that was her twin's; but she felt a quaint wish that she might be glad of it like a mother, standing on one side because that was her rightful place, with her social life so far behind that it could be taken for granted as successful.

"This being a girl is too hard work," she decided, as the peace of her big, quiet room closed about her.

Late as it was, her evening was not quite over. The birthday always held one final ceremony. Diantha lit the gas in the tilting old brackets above her desk and, smiling expectantly, ran a hand down into its most secret recess, bringing out a small morocco book. "Diary" flourished in gold across its cover, but on the first page had been written in a school-girl hand, "A Letter to Ugly Women," and a date seven years back. Beneath ran an explanation:

> Harriet Martineau wrote a Letter to the Deaf, telling them how to bear it. It seems to me that a Letter to the Ugly is just as necessary. I may not know how to bear it, but I know what *not* to do.

The pages that followed had been written in what Diantha had considered her heart's blood, and the yearly rereading had been at first a bitter duty, a stern scourging of her young pride, lest she forget. Then its pain had grown remote, its tragic earnestness had at first mortified and presently bored her,

as youthful gush. And at last, at twenty-six, she could sit down to it smiling, as at something a little pathetic, and rather funny, and valuable as an honest record of her eighteen-year-old self. She probably would not read it again until some chance turned it up, years later.

It began with verse:

> The sad winds sigh about my door,
> The storm clouds lower, stern and black,
> Sky frowns at earth and earth frowns back,
> All joy is fled for evermore,
> And Love sits sobbing!

It is the saddest night of my life, and so, I suppose, the wisest. I see truly at last: I see my whole life, and that of all women born under this shadow. I am not going to make light of our affliction. I am not going to insult you by pretending that it does n't matter so long as you do your duty and all that everlasting old stuff. I am going to admit every inch of how horrible it is, and then I am going to tell you what we have to do about it—for now I know. It won't be easy, but it won't be as awful as struggling on, pretending it is n't so, trying not to believe the worst, thinking that you 're going to get *what you never will.* If you 're afraid of plain white truth, don't go on with this letter.

There are kinds and degrees of ugliness, but there is only one kind that concerns me or you, and that is the kind that men don't and can't love. As a matter of fact, I am not a horror. My eyes are as good as Sylvia's, and I have a better mouth. But men only talk to me when they're waiting for a chance at her. I'm the plain one —the dark one—the fat one—if they think to refer to me at all. And it isn't just the contrast, though of course that makes it worse. It is *my kind.* I can remember still the joke of being mixed up with Sylvia. And now people say, "The queer thing is, there really is a likeness between you. At least, one can see—" I sometimes have a feeling that the beauty is still there, underneath; that I could be scraped and cleaned up, just as they scrape the surface off dingy old walls and uncover lovely frescoes. How would I bear it, I wonder? However, miracles don't happen.

I want you to know what has brought me to-night. Last November our Aunt Eleanor in New York decided to give us a season. She said, "I want to bring Sylvia out this winter—and I suppose Diantha ought to have a chance, too." If I had known what I now know, wild horses couldn't have dragged me down to that ghastly city. But I was ignorant and full of hope, and crazy about my clothes. So I went. I thought that coming out just meant a lot of parties and fun.

It is nothing of the sort. It is a series of trials by torture. Everything you go to is like a business venture

on which your whole fortune is staked. *You have got to succeed.* And you will get no help—every girl is for herself, gay outside, grim death underneath, with all her relatives anxious and watching and whispering to each other, "Is she a success?" At a party, no girl even sees other girls, she can't bear to have them speak to her—she just sees Partners! I went into it almost a child and now, a few months later, I am a disillusioned woman with her youth behind her.

There is no use telling it by halves. I am going to face this thing just as it is, without pretending or explaining things away. I *loathe* people who fool themselves. Conrad Livingston. That name came into my life eight weeks ago to-day, at five in the afternoon. I have met men who impressed me as strong or clever or important, but the feeling he gave me was, "You are the *pleasantest* man I ever met in my life." It was n't just manners: it went to the bone. It shone out of his eyes. It bubbled in his laugh. And it made him turn wholly to any person he met, all ready to find her interesting. We sat down together in a corner, and for an hour I did n't even remember that there was a tea going on about us. It was like being in the most wonderful sunlight. And we laughed and laughed.

Of course, I had appeared well. No one could help it. He came to call the next Sunday, and it began just as wonderfully. Then Sylvia came in.

I am not blaming her. It would have been the same

with any beautiful girl. I had been half seeing it all winter, only I had n't realized. I know now, forever, what men are and what they want. I shall not forget to my dying day how he stared and stared and stared. He went right on liking me and brimming with pleasantness, and for a while I tried to fool myself. Then came That Night. It was two weeks ago yesterday. There was a mix-up in dances, and he let me give up one of mine with him, so that he need not miss one with Sylvia. He said I was a "good sort" and squeezed my hand, then flew to her. And so I knew.

I made an excuse to come home the next day and for two weeks I have been wandering about the bare woods by myself, trying to get it all thought out, but mostly just suffering. To-day it rained and, being in the library, I came on that Letter to the Deaf.

There are no words for what it did for me. It seemed to say, "Afflicted? Why, yes, child, of course you are. Horribly. Hopelessly. Now how are you going to help being a nuisance because of it? And how much can you get out of life in spite of it? Work it out, work it out!" It was like a scolding, and a trumpet, and a great, kind arm. And now that I have worked it out, I feel old, and sadder than I ever was in my life, but some way safe, and at peace.

We must do without love, you and I. We must not look for it, or hope for it, or dream it, or even go where we think we may find it—because we won't find it. We must teach ourselves that there is absolutely no

hope. Then we can go ahead and perhaps learn to take an interest in something else. And even if we fail in that, we shall at least have done the square and dignified thing. Put it all away, forever and forever. No more agony over partners, no more mortification, no more crushing blows. And no more hope. That is our sentence.

More poetry followed, pages of it. How she had burned and wept over the delicious occupation of making it—how good she had thought it and, oh, how bad it was! Diantha closed the book and slowly dropped it back into its hiding place. She could smile and yet, after all, the girl's vision had proved true. She had warm friends, but no man had loved her. In the pride of her hurt withdrawal, she had turned a passive, unexpectant blankness towards her little world and it had slipped easily past, with no time to wonder about her. The young men of fashion who came to see Sylvia treated her deferentially, as though she were a maiden aunt, and used her occasionally as a chaperon. There had been a period when artists and musicians were in favor, walking up from the train with dusty boots, and littering the drawing-

room with autographed offerings; and some among them had made Diantha their friend and confidante —but not one had ever tried to kiss her. Men were always trying, with Sylvia. Diantha had found her shedding tears of rage over it one night—Sylvia being then distinctly younger and less experienced than the Sylvia of to-day. Diantha had realized with a sense of shock that such an attempt would not have left her in tears.

"I 'd be singing hosannas," she had told herself, with grim honesty; and felt that Sylvia was of finer clay than she.

She had her dreams, of course, dreams of the miracle that would give her back her lost heritage so that she should bloom like Sylvia, and every one should be glad when she came, and her steps should go to music all day long. Yet they did not cloud the reality. She had a nice life, on the whole. She was interested, and busy, and she would make a splendid aunt when Sylvia should finally give up her serene expectation of the superman and recon-

cile herself to a flaw or two in her life's partner. Would it be Courtland, with his horses and dogs and acres? Or would she perhaps settle down to Conrad? Diantha rose with sudden vigor.

"If I am going to bed at all, I might as well start," she announced.

Sylvia came down at noon the next day, fresh and lovely, her long, slender grace emphasized by a "little" wash gown of Parisian handwork, a morning bloom on the faint hollows of her cheeks. Sylvia had not an ounce of flesh where it was not needed, and plumpness looked almost vulgar beside her delicate concavities. She always moved obliviously in her own home, absorbed in the complex affairs of her outside life. Her glance touched her mother and sister without realizing them as she turned to her desk and a pile of letters. Diantha, who was mending a curtain, torn last night, made no attempt to communicate with the absent spirit, but Mrs. Brooke's delight in her came out in a beaming, "Well, dear!"

The greeting presently reached Sylvia's attention, reminding her to look up and smile.

"Oh, good morning, Mother!" She spoke pleasantly, being instinctively a good-humored person. Then her mind slipped off again, but apparently not in the way it should go, for the pen in her hand remained poised and idle. Finally she laid it down.

"Do you know that we have an interesting neighbor?" she began. "That young man who looks like his dog—"

"My dear!"

"Well, not in features; but there 's something brown and hard and brisk about him. I like his looks. And it seems he is quite a famous explorer."

"Oh, is he that Wendell?" Diantha had looked up from her curtain. "Mark Wendell? Why, I have read about him. He made a Polar trip, did n't he?"

"I believe he climbed something that no one else ever climbed—I don't know what—it does n't matter. I think we 'd better know him."

"I 'm sure it won't be hard, dear!" Mrs. Brooke's smile had a humorous significance; but Sylvia never responded to such allusions.

"An explorer might be rather worth while," she went on, thinking it out aloud. "One gets so tired of sportsmen; they never know anything else. And yet artists and writers—I don't know—they are so apt to be—home-made, someway. One does n't like social amateurs."

"How about professional men?" Diantha was always curious about Sylvia's mental attitudes. "They are often men of the world; and they have to have brains."

"Yes, but they are so poor, usually; and business men are so horrid. I should like to try an explorer, anyway. Ask him to call, will you, Mother, when you have a chance?"

"I will call there, dear, if you like," was the ready answer.

"Oh, no. We don't want the whole family." Sylvia went back to her letters, then paused again. "Aunt Eleanor wants me at Bar Harbor, so August

is disposed of; and I have plenty of invitations for the other months. So we don't have to worry about the summer."

"Not about your summer," Diantha corrected her, with perfect good humor.

"I shall stay here, dear," Mrs. Brooke put in. "I am very happy at home."

Sylvia was looking faintly worried. "I supposed you would do something pleasant," she said vaguely. Diantha would not help her out. She occasionally disciplined her twin, who accepted it with astonishing docility. A sigh broke from her. "Aunt Eleanor suggested that we all come to Bar Harbor,"—she brought it out reluctantly—"but I did n't suppose you would want to. You never do. And it means so many clothes and things—of a kind you don't need."

"True. And I told Aunt Eleanor so, myself, when she suggested it." Diantha fastened her thread and rose. "Still, I suppose Mother and I ought to get some change."

"Oh, of course," Sylvia assented; then, dimly

conscious that she had been remiss, she laid some samples, filmy as cobwebs, before her sister. "Which would you take?" she asked.

Diantha made a choice, from sheer love of the pretty fabrics: she knew that her decision would not penetrate the lacquered surface of Sylvia's inattention. There had been moments when this imperviousness had moved her to hot rage, and she had known startling impulses to seize the slender shoulders and shake them well, to hurt her and so break a way into her field of vision. But the habit of self-control had bred tolerance, and she was only amused when Sylvia passed over her choice without comment to point out her own.

"I wonder if there is anything on earth I could say—not about herself—that would interest Sylvy?" she thought, looking with wistful appreciation at the picture the other made, sitting before the towering old mahogany desk. "I might scream very loud," she added, and smiled over the probable effect. "Oh, well, if I were a beauty, I would n't listen, either." And she went on philosophically

with the morning's work. The old house provided plenty to do.

The day was Saturday, and there was a note of expectation in Sylvia's gown and hair. Diantha realized that some of last night's guests would be staying over Sunday in the neighborhood, but it did not occur to her to ask who was expected. Sylvia never shared her affairs, or discussed her movements. Early in the warm, drowsy afternoon, as Diantha was settling down for a nap, she heard a motor outside, and voices, and Sylvia's light step running up to her room. As she passed Diantha's door on the way down, she called back,

"I 'll bring them home to tea, Di—five people," and hurried on without waiting for an answer.

Diantha met the news with a resigned mutter, and tried to go to sleep in spite of it; but the facts of the case presently dragged her up. The kitchen, overtired from yesterday, was in a touchy state and might not lightly be asked for extra service. There was no cake left, and probably not enough bread

for sandwiches, and the big teapot undoubtedly needed polishing.

"I can't eat cake—why should I have to make it?" sighed Diantha between a yawn and a groan. Then she arose and prepared for work.

The kitchen shades were drawn and the room empty, but there was still fire in the range, and that was something, Diantha admitted, crossly slamming lids and dampers. At first she could think only of her own fatigue and the inconsiderateness of others, but gradually, as she mixed her cake, her spirit rose above her body. The love of what youth calls life, denied, starved, buried, was nevertheless still quick in her veins, and the prospect of the group about the tea table put fresh strength into unwilling members. She would play a very minor part, for, though she was no longer shy or helpless, it never occurred to her to throw off the passivity that her young pride had chosen. She would pour tea and see that every one had cake and, as usual, look on. But the men would treat her prettily, jumping to wait on her, and the girls would include her in the general friendli-

ness, and it would look as if she belonged. Sylvia might be inconsiderate, but after all, without the sudden invasions of her world, this would be a dull old place. Diantha was humming long before her preparations were finished.

At half past four the tea table stood in readiness by the lilac hedge, under the elm that had always shadowed their tea parties, but whose mighty trunk was now half on neighbor's land. Diantha, in a fresh gown, added a warm loaf of cake, then went back to be sure that the kettle was boiling, and to put tea in the brightly polished teapot.

"Sylvia will want sandwiches, too, but she can't have them," she announced to the empty kitchen; but relented sufficiently to take out biscuits and jam. She was lame from dancing, vaguely ill with weariness, and crossed the lawn so slowly that she did not disturb a guest who had already arrived at the party. On the linen and lace tea-cloth, laundered not an hour before after a vain effort to let it do as it was, black paw marks surrounded an empty plate, and in the grass a little distance away the Boston terrier

of the blue brick house next door was devouring her fresh cake with a rapture that ought to have warmed a cook's heart. Diantha stood quite still, unable for the moment to believe that anything so dreadful could have happened. Then out of her despair she spoke with bitter clearness:

"Good little Fido! Cunning little tricksy thing! Oh, but I 'd like to wring your neck!" A quaver broke the last word. She was twenty-six, and she knew it was funny, but she could n't help it.

There was movement on the other side of the hedge, a sound of dropping books. Then an arm parted the lilacs and an anxious face appeared. The disaster was plain enough—the oblivious dog with the cake clasped between his paws, the marred tea-table, the flushed and tragic girl.

"Border!" At the shout, Border's dream ended, his twist of tail sank. As his master strode through the hedge, he scuttled abjectly under it, leaving his booty in the grass.

"I 'll *kill* that dog," said Mark Wendell between his teeth.

"Oh, no—don't—wait!" She tried to laugh. "He could n't help it. Any dog would have. He did n't know he was doing wrong."

"Did n't he!" was the uncompromising answer. "Will you stay here a minute?" There was battle in his eye, and Diantha could not bear it.

"Have n't I got enough to stand, without having a dog beaten, too?" she burst out. "I don't care if you kill him, but I won't hear him howl!" It was the voice of endurance pushed to its last notch. Wendell had heard it in far corners of the earth, and he yielded to it, reluctantly, his militant indignation still simmering. He had a soldierly bearing, and his lean shoulders looked as though they would hurt in a chance encounter.

"That is exactly why American children are so spoiled," he scolded her. "It is n't being humane: it is sheer sentimentality. That little chap ought to have a good licking; but you would rather he were a thief than hear a few yelps. It 's all wrong." He was very much in earnest, and quite forgetful of the abject apology that the circumstances demanded.

Diantha would have braced herself to comfort dismay, but she was in no mood to accept reproaches.

"That 's all very well," she said in a forlorn voice; "but this is the best tea-cloth, and there is no more cake in the house. I spent the afternoon making that." She pointed to the broken remnants, sparing him nothing, but even that did not bring the expected prostration. He looked grave, concerned, but actively intelligent rather than overwhelmed. Then his hand snapped up in a gesture that seemed to say, "I 've got it!" and he marched off to his own house.

Diantha waited, drooping wearily in a garden chair, but aware that the situation was in competent hands. He was back very soon, bearing an embroidered cloth and a silver basket piled high with cakes. Her faint protest was disregarded.

"Just sit still," he commanded and, having studied the table, he made his plan of action, then proceeded to carry it out with the neatness and despatch of a military orderly. His care to put everything back exactly as she had placed it made Diantha

smile. He had keen little hazel eyes, and his brows frowned over them as though they were habitually trying to penetrate far distances. It was perhaps the short brown mustache above the square, cleft chin that seemed to call for a forage cap and a wild background. He looked responsible, she thought, and efficient, and perhaps, like his body, a little hard. She felt curiously at ease with him, and took the initiative as she never dreamed of doing with Sylvia's men.

"You are not at all my idea of an explorer," she said suddenly.

He was amused. "Why not?"

"One thinks of an explorer as a semi-wild creature, a visionary, a chaser of dreams. You are so practical and orderly."

"Is n't it the same difference that you find between the old-fashioned sick-nurse, all heart and ignorance, and a modern trained, scientific hospital graduate, who can put the job through, and is sufficiently kind?"

"I suppose it is," she assented, and sighed as for something gone.

"I 'm sorry to be so disappointing," he said humbly. "If you could see me three months from a barber, you might feel better. I assure you, it is a real vocation. I ran away every year or two when I was a youngster. Even at West Point—"

"Ah, then you have been a soldier!"

"Yes, for three years. But how did you know it?"

Her glance took in his cropped head and squared shoulders, the erect ease with which he stood before her, and her wise, dry little smile drew down one corner of her mouth.

"One of those marvelous feminine intuitions," she said. "But you are not in the army now, are you? Should I be calling you Captain or General?"

"No: I did n't graduate. I had a chance to go with a Polar expedition, so I resigned—with joy. The army was no life for me."

"I don't know—you seem to forage very success-

fully. Tell me, what will your family say when it 's time for cakes?"

He disposed of the family with a shrug. "Oh, they have plenty, anyway; too much. Now is n't there something else I can do?"

Diantha remembered her twin's command. "The very least you can do is to come to the party," she said. She offered it as a reward and was surprised to see the beginning of a refusal in his head shake. "My sister will be here," she added.

"The beauty," he supplemented. "Thank you, I think I will run away. I don't like beauties."

"But every one likes Sylvia!" Diantha was indignant.

"No: they don't like a beauty," he corrected her, sitting on the broad arm of a garden chair. "They merely love her. I know; we had one in our family. She is married now, thank heaven. But you can't tell me anything about a beauty in the house."

"But what has meeting Sylvia to do with a beauty in the house?" Diantha inquired, a fine little edge on her voice. A flush showed through his sunburn.

He rallied instantly, but she had seen it, and a look of bored enlightenment lifted her eyebrows. " 'The knitting-women count twenty-two,' " was her silent comment. He was protesting.

"Oh, please! I am not altogether a donkey. That was n't quite fair, was it?"

"Probably not," said Diantha, and they both laughed. "I don't see why you mind just meeting them," she added. Wendell settled down into the chair.

"It means being drawn into social doings—that is n't fatuous, is it?" he broke off anxiously. "They do invite one?"

"That is quite permissible. They do."

"Thank you. Well, I am home only for a few weeks longer, to get a book finished before my next trip, and it means working day and night, literally. I can't let in any disturbing—ah, look there!" with a quick change of tone. "Don't say anything or notice, but watch."

A brindled brown object was wriggling slowly, fearfully, under the hedge. Diantha thought the

thief was returning for the rest of the cake, but Wendell knew his man better.

"Keep right on talking," he said. "Don't appear to see him. It 's a case of conscience."

Border crawled disjointedly towards them, his eyes yearning up to his master's face, his trailing body apparently on the point of dissolution. At Wendell's feet he crouched forlornly, with smothered, weeping sounds and a timid paw touching his boot.

"You see? He knows he ought to have had that licking, and his universe is all awry," Wendell explained. "He 's saying, 'Kill me or forgive me, but for heaven's sake do it now!' "

"Don't make him wait," Diantha pleaded. He bent down.

"You know you were a bad dog, Border?" Border knew it, passionately, and pressed up towards the hovering hand. It dropped heartily, in token of restored friendship. "All right, little boy," said Wendell, and Diantha saw that he was not hard—at least, not to his dog. Border's frenzy of relief

had to be worked off in circles and figure eights, and then he settled down at his master's feet, pressed tightly against his leg. The lump of cake, still lying in the grass, did not exist for him.

"But you will have to leave him when you go," said Diantha.

"Yes. In my profession, one ought not to love even a dog," he assented, answering the thing unspoken. "Do you know, I don't believe your tea party is coming? It is half past five."

"I suppose they changed their minds," she said resignedly.

"That is just like a beauty," Wendell declared. "My sister Agatha would have the servants up half the night, getting an after-the-theater supper ready; and then she would telephone that they had decided to go to a café—or she would n't even telephone." He rose up in his irritation. "There are very few women who can survive beauty—they take so much, and give so little! And if a man—" A motor at the gate cut short his harangue. Diantha saw his glance leap with the swift sureness of an arrow to

the flying white veil on the front seat. Then he turned away. "Forgive me—I 'll vanish."

"Some take it fighting, and some lie right down from the beginning," she mused, as the lilacs closed on him. "To her that hath—! Will Silvy care?"

She was half way to the kitchen before she saw that Sylvia had come in alone. The car was speeding away with the others. Diantha must have been seriously overtired, for her breast rose and fell with a childish intensity of disappointment. She turned back and began to gather up the tea things, blindly, with fumbling hands. Then suddenly she laughed.

"The company did n't come, and so Diantha wept bitterly," she murmured. "Oh, does one never really grow up?"

II

"HE doesn't want to meet you, Sylvy;" Diantha's eyes had a covert twinkle. "He is very busy and can't be bothered with girls."

"Really?" observed Sylvia, glancing towards their blue brick neighbor with lifted eyebrows. She was seated on the veranda steps in very fine array, a white cloak over her arm, waiting to be called for. The picture that she made contrasted her humorously with her twin who, in short skirt and ancient sweater, was violently spading up a garden bed. Diantha spasmodically went in for heavy exercise on the principle that, if it did not make her thin, at least she might be fatter without it. Not being at all strong, she was frequently ill after these bouts; but she maintained an obstinate faith in their value.

"Yes." She had to stop for breath. "He is

writing a book about his last trip and does n't want to be asked to things."

"He might have waited to see if he were asked, don't you think?" Sylvia suggested, very gently.

"But I had asked him to tea. He is not conventional, you know. He says what he thinks."

"Well, if he thinks anything that is worth saying—!" Sylvia's shrug implied that few of the men she met did.

"Oh, he has brains; nice, young, definite brains. If he did meet you, you know, he would probably begin by giving you a scolding."

"What for?"

"Oh, just for being you."

"That might be an amusing change. O Di, those nasty worms—how can you?"

Di spaded harder than ever. "Got to," she panted. "I 'm tired of being—so—good-natured. I want to be—thin—and cross—for a while."

"You will have one of your attacks," Sylvia warned, but absently. Her glance, avoiding the unfortunate worms, had been caught by an upper

corner of the next house, visible between the elms. At an open window she could see a dark head bent over a writing table, the face shielded by a scholarly hand. She fell into meditation, that presently ended in a restless sigh.

"Di, how do you feel about love and marriage?" she asked.

Diantha had her answer for that. "Why, Sylvy, I think that marriage is often a failure, but that singleness always is." She enjoyed saying it—she so seldom had a chance to express the conclusions that she had laboriously lived out, one by one; but Sylvia was not heeding.

"Men are always disappointing, when you really know them," she objected.

"Don't you expect too much?" Diantha asked. "Nobody's perfect, you know. Even you and I have a flaw or two."

"It is n't expecting much to ask that a man should n't make silly jokes;" Sylvia was plaintive. "How could one care for a person who expresses high spirits by talking Irish?"

"Poor Mr. Courtland!" Diantha had an air of spading him under.

"I can't help it. Aunt Eleanor is cross about it, but I am unworldly enough to want to marry for love." Sylvia looked like a beautiful martyr, but her twin smiled.

"*With* all this world's advantages," she supplemented.

"Well, really, Di, have n't we had enough of being poor?" She rose and stepped down into the garden. "Conrad never offends one in any way," she added over her shoulder. "Why is it that he does n't count more?"

Fortunately, she did not wait for an answer. Diantha had no wish to see Conrad married, but the slight to him so exasperated her that she could have laid hot hands on the unconscious Sylvia, trailing her cloak across the grass. His career might not be distinguished, but, oh, the pleasantness of him, the outflowing geniality that seemed to enwrap all the ugly facts of life with glamour, that made "good morning" a living welcome, and turned a wait in

the rain into a joke! In heaven's name, what more could a sane woman want?

Sylvia stood in the bright green of the grass, fair and slender, looking down the drive. Her white veil left her eyes in mystery, but revealed cheek and chin as it drooped to touch a shoulder. She was in full view of the upper window next door, but the face there was still shielded by the scholarly hand, and one might not know where the eyes were directed. No one ever denied Sylvia's beauty. Those who resisted it might add that it was not a kind they cared for; but there could be no two opinions about the fact. If it was not especially subtle or elusive, it was a perfect human blossoming, and though she bore it with full knowledge of its worth, there was no marring air of self-consciousness, no line that betrayed elated vanity. Diantha, dark and stubby in her gray sweater, suddenly forgave her and, sighing, fell to work again.

A call aroused her. In at the gate from the high-road had ambled a broad red cow. It was a stupid, vulgar looking cow with muddy legs and a caked

tail, and though it paused at Sylvia's abrupt turn, it showed no consciousness of intrusion. Sylvia wrapped her skirts tightly about her, evidently confusing the ways of cows with those of mice, but stood her ground.

"Go away, horrid beast," she commanded. The horrid beast stared, then, interrupted by a fly on the flank, gave its head a rotary toss to that side. Any one familiar with the habits of cows must have seen that its intentions were entirely peaceful; but Sylvia misunderstood, and fled to the porch, dropping her white cloak on the way.

"Di! Drive it out," she implored.

Diantha was fearless, but shaken with laughter. The change from commanding grace to frank scamper had been too funny. She laughed all the power out of her arms and voice, so that the cow took no account of her waving spade and advanced serenely into the heart of these green pastures, planting a dirty hoof in passing full on Sylvia's abandoned cloak.

There was no more amusement after that. Di-

antha went for the intruder in earnest, and, having effected a rout, came anxiously back to where Sylvia was gathering up her trampled garment.

"Oh, my dear, is it hurt?" She might have been speaking of a trampled child.

"Quite ruined," was the curt answer.

"Oh, no, Sylvy; that will come off, truly. Let me take it and try!" By her distress, one would have supposed that Diantha had trodden it herself. Sylvia remained coldly aloof.

"It is no use. They will come for me any minute now, and I can't possibly wear it. I simply can't go."

"But your pongee, dear!"

"I can't go with the Ainleys in that old rag. This was the only proper thing I had—one of the joys of being poor." Her voice rose. "If you had taken the trouble to help me, it need n't have happened. But you just stood there, roaring. You will have to tell them that I can't go." And she turned to the house. Diantha stood humbled, hurt, distressed.

"But what shall I say to them?"

"Anything you choose." Sylvia was already at the steps. "I am sorry to miss the garden party: I wanted it more than anything that has come up in months. If you had helped! Now I can't go, and that ends it."

She went into the house, and a sorry silence fell over the old garden. Diantha stood with bent head, absently thrusting her spade into the loam, until a motor horn at the gate roused her. She started, then looked wistfully up at Sylvia's windows for a relenting sign; but the curtains did not stir. Slowly and unhappily, she went to meet the approaching car.

She would not invent reasons. She simply said that Sylvia had found "at the last minute" that she could not go, but said it with so grieved a look in her honest eyes that they inferred inexpressible difficulties and went forgivingly on their way. Diantha sat down on the side steps where Sylvia had sat, her elbows on her knees and her knuckles digging into her cheeks. All the day's brightness was dimmed. It had not been exactly her fault, and

yet she might have prevented it. To mar Sylvia's clothes was so dreadful! She had not many, considering her way of life and her beauty's needs, and each one had the treasured importance of a star with no understudy. And then, Sylvia's good times mattered so vitally: the whole house was run with reference to them when she was at home. The thought of her in her lovely gown upstairs alone while the garden party went on without her, was intolerable. Diantha could have cried. She sat there in frank dejection, unconscious of the darting spring life about her, until a step on the gravel brought a thrilled hope. She lifted her head.

"Conrad!" In her joy, she held out both hands, and, according to his pleasant custom, he kissed them. She was too glad for Sylvia to realize how glad she was for herself. No situation was hopeless with Conrad there. She could tell the tragedy quite simply, without the rearrangements that must usually shield the family from the outsider; Conrad might be trusted to see that it really was tragedy, and he would not waste time in contending that Sylvia

ought to have taken it differently. He laughed, of course, and Diantha laughed, too, the cow and the lady being one of the eternal jokes. Then he meditated while she hopefully watched him. Conrad was of medium height, of medium good looks—any ball room would show a dozen of him; and that very touch of conventionality was a part of his charm for Diantha, who had left his world while it was still a place of painful enchantment. She saw his readiness to be kind, to take trouble, as an overwhelming beauty in one so high.

"Why should n't I take her?" he solved it. "I have the runabout here; and she can throw off her old coat before we arrive. We 'll go in saying, 'Dear me, how warm it is! One can't endure a wrap.' " His little actings—generally of fine ladies, or of self-important men—always made her laugh.

"Do you know the people?" she asked.

"No; but that does n't matter. Men are scarce, my dear." His serene effrontery gave her a pang for all girls, submerged in a sex that is not scarce.

"Lucky you! But what will Sylvia say to the Ainleys? They came for her, you know."

"The truth, of course: the whole story. She 'll make a hit with it—the smart coat, and the cow, and her temper. Can't you hear her?"

"No," Diantha spoke wonderingly. "I did n't know she could—tell things."

"Oh, rather. That is one reason she is such a success: she makes them laugh. You can't do it on beauty alone."

"But I never heard her tell a story!"

"Oh, she 's very good: just lets it fall in a casual, bored sort of way." He actually looked like Sylvia as he said it. "You know how she would. Where is she?"

"Go in and call upstairs," Diantha said, and sat adjusting herself to this new vision of Sylvia turning her catastrophe into a tale for the crowd. It took the stress out of the mishap, and yet it left her feeling lonely and shut out. Sylvia was never funny at home.

"I suppose it is n't worth while," Diantha ad-

mitted, and wondered anew if anything on earth could happen to make her seem of importance to her twin.

Conrad sat on the bottom step of the wide old stairs, Sylvia leaned over the railing at the top. He was laughing at her, teasing her, frankly loving her. She suffered him with faintly amused eyes and a passive droop of hands and shoulders. That she had not taken off her elaborate gown showed a certain blind faith in her star—or in the readiness of other people to contrive for her. At first she would not hear of going; but Conrad's arguments were astute.

"You can't waste a wearing of that gown on the family," was one of them; and, for a climax, "I hear that the daughter of the house is a charmer, and I want to meet her. Won't you take me?"

Sylvia straightened up at that. "Oh, if you really want to go," she said, and went back for the pongee coat. Conrad sent Diantha a joyous signal as he came out, and she waved her happy relief. He was giving up the chance of a golden afternoon with

Sylvia for a crowd and social gyrations and an occasional glimpse of her surrounded by others; and Diantha was speeding away the being whose coming was her dearest event,—but neither thought of that. They were conscious only of triumph—Sylvia's day had been saved.

The white cloak was cleansed, pressed and put away in good order, and Diantha, in a fresh gown, cut flowers for the table, hoping that Conrad would come back to dinner. Neither he nor Sylvia appeared, however, and, after the delayed meal had been eaten, she wandered down to the gates to watch for them. It was no night on which to be a little tired and disappointed and a good deal lonely—no night for single women at all. The soft, milky warmth drew a piercing sweetness out of wide open blossoms, and the rising moon was a silver blaze through the tree tops. She tried to creep for comfort into the secret, childish drama she still could play: the dingy enchantment was to break, she was to step out in all her lost loveliness to universal love and welcome. But to-night its comfort failed her.

It could not come true, so what was the good of dreaming it? Her heart was aching for something real.

"'And Love sits sobbing!'" Diantha remarked to the swelling in her breast, and so smiled, and faced the night with a more secure courage.

Her neighbor was pacing the front edge of his lawn, the little dog close at his heels. He turned to join her, and would have emptied his pipe, but she stopped him.

"I much prefer it to wistaria," she asserted.

"I am glad some one else had the sense to come out," he said. "Fancy staying in to play bridge to-night!" The direction of his nod pictured his family behind the lighted windows. His air was militant, even disciplinary. Diantha saw him as boyishly cocksure of what the world should do and impatient that he might not issue orders, and she found a maternal amusement in opposing him. He was several years older than she, but she felt herself vastly mature.

"Sensible people," she maintained. "To shut the

blinds and play bridge is the only way to cope with such a night."

"They are n't coping," he objected. "When I attacked them, they said, 'Oh, well, dummy can go out and smell the magnolias!' That 's all they care." He looked surprised at her laugh, then he laughed, too. "They say I am growing into an old scold," he admitted. "But when I come back to civilization after these long absences, it does astonish me so. I forget it is like that. It ought not to be like that!" He could smile at himself, but he meant it.

"What ought it to be like?" she asked with deceptive simplicity.

"Oh, I could tell you;" his nod was for her concealed smile. "But it would take several hours, and I don't believe even your patience would last out."

Diantha, seated on the wall, forgot for the moment to watch and listen. "What do you know about my patience?" she asked. He laughed, but would not explain.

"I am convinced that you are an extraordinarily

good sort," he said. The phrase sent a shiver through her. A good sort—Conrad had said it so often that she had grown even a little fond of the term from him; but she did not want it said to her to-night.

"That is the consolation prize," she complained. "No one ever calls Sylvia a good sort."

"No, I should suppose not," he assented, wilfully twisting her meaning. "You would n't say it of Agatha, either. And yet," he admitted, thoughtfully tapping his pipe on the wall, "when she married and went away, the family could n't stand it. She had never given them anything—just taken and taken; and yet they could n't do without her. They pulled up the roots of years and left an old home for this perfectly correct piece of architecture, simply to be within reach of her. It is astounding, that power." Their eyes met with frank understanding.

"It 's because the beauties are a center for life;" Diantha was eager to explain. "Things happen, where they are. The house is dull without them.

It is being on the main line instead of a side track—or a canal route."

"It is more than that;" he hesitated, then went on with averted face; "it 's the thing that makes you spoil them—forgive them seventy times seven things you would n't stand once from any one else. The thing that makes fools of us." He had an impatient kick for the stone wall. By a flash of intuition, Diantha saw why he was there.

"The thing that makes us watch the road, just to see them go by," she said casually. He made no answer, and they sat rather sadly in their own thoughts till a shivering whimper from Border brought them back with a laugh.

"He can't cope with this evening, either," she said, drawing the little dog up beside her and offering him the comfort of a kindly arm.

"Do you know what such a night makes me want?" he began. She thought she knew what it made every one want, but waited. "To be stark alone half way up a great, bald, white mountain—nothing but moon and sky and this vast, lonely slab

with your tiny self crawling over its face: the world below just a blur of shadow. That happened to me once." His voice showed that he had not often told this. "I don't suppose it will ever be repeated, but I am always hoping. It was like the hour of Creation. And it fixed my career." He turned to her with a smile. "I married the Universe, that night."

She had shuddered. "Oh, desolate! Why not have an Eve, too—waiting down in the blur of shadow?"

"H'm!" It was a note of derision.

"Do you mean, that is all I know about Eve? Or about men?" she asked with detached politeness. He laughed his contrition.

"My family say that I make very rude sounds," he apologized. "But, you know, waiting at the foot is n't just in the modern Eve's line. Besides—" But he did not finish. "No: it 's all or nothing, with the Universe," he concluded. "Now I must go back and get some work done."

The lights of a runabout were coming rapidly

towards them. Wendell left abruptly, and Diantha smiled at the ostentatious closing of the front door after him.

"He was n't watching for anybody—dear, no!" she assented.

The runabout brought Conrad, but not Sylvia. They had gone home to dinner with friends and Sylvia, persuaded to stay all night, had sent Conrad for her things. His pleasant face looked tired in the soft light.

"Ride up there with me, Di," he urged. "I shall have to come back by here, anyway; and it is n't late." His voice confided to her that he wanted comfort, and the rich warmth of her assent answered. "Good old Di," he said, and took her hand as they went into the house together. Di, in her own room, laid the hand against her cheek.

"I 've got his affection—I 've got that!" she insisted.

III

WHEN a young woman has been left on one side by what youth calls life, she is not displeased to have a young man come to her for help; and perhaps Mark Wendell knew this. Certainly his apology for the appeal was a matter of manners rather than of diffidence. He was not conceited, but his way of life had taught him a man's value. Already, at twenty-nine, he had added data to the world's map, and the clubs and societies that had honored his work had given a rousing personal welcome to the alert, soldierly, earnest young fellow, with his straight speech and his positive convictions. Women would have welcomed him, too, very prettily, but he was too hard a worker to accept invitations—or so he gave out. If there was fear in his avoidance of them, fear of soft, inescapable, desirable bonds that must check his career, they did not

guess it. His eyes faced them very brightly, with a hard interestedness rather than a soft appeal, and he left them without lingerings, like a soldier under orders. Diantha, who had looked on until her sight was perilously acute, suspected that he turned to her because here he was not afraid, but she only smiled a little over the discovery, content to get so stimulating a companionship on any terms. She was no scorner of half loaves.

It began the day that Sylvia started off for her June visits. The entire household had washed, pressed, sewed, shopped and packed until the moment of departure, and the sudden quiet that had followed was bewildering. Diantha, tired though she was, felt lost and blank as she wandered out into the garden. Her own neglected interests awaited her, but the handling of Sylvia's laces and embroideries had left her restless, the glamour of Sylvia's world had dulled her own.

"I need exercise," she said from sturdy habit, then, as the aching of her bones denied that explanation, "I mean, I need rest," she amended, and planted her-

self in a garden seat, eyes closed and hands folded, determined to sit out the discontent. Peace would always come, she had discovered, if you would just hold on long enough.

The disciplinary rite was interrupted by a step on the grass. Her eyes sprang open, glad of release.

"I was n't asleep," she said, for Mark Wendell was in the act of retreat.

"I want a synonym," he explained, standing straightly before her, the papers in his hand held off at arm's length, and even shaken a little, as though they had tried him beyond endurance. "Please help me. This miserable business of writing! I have said 'came' seven times on one page—'we came to'—and so we did. We came to rapids and moose and buffalo tracks and beaver and jack-pine all day long. How can I vary it?"

The question was one after Diantha's own heart. Ever since the days when she wrote poetry, she had loved the wording of things. She took charge so competently that Wendell put the papers into her hand and sat down hopefully beside her. The style,

like himself, was terse and virile—he could make what he had seen interesting; but, also like himself, it was a little lacking in elasticity. She looked up from the pages to him with a secret smile for the resemblance.

"You need limbering up," she told him. "You 're just a bit—muscle-bound." Nothing escaped those keen little hazel eyes under their frowning brows.

"Is this a literary criticism or an allegory?" he asked, and she had to laugh.

They worked until the sun was gone and a chill had fallen on the garden. The next day, with a perfunctory apology, he brought her the previous chapters, beautifully written in a hand as clear as print, and for three happy weeks they met daily to work together. Diantha was very tactful, very restrained in her suggestions, but she scarcely needed to be. Wendell was delightfully free from irritable vanity, and took her suggestions so simply and seriously that she sometimes felt like a teacher with a nice boy pupil. The book's language had lost none of its

character, but was pleasantly enriched and varied, when they laid down the last page and faced each other across the completed manuscript. They were old friends now, at comradely ease.

"You have been good," Wendell reiterated. "You ought to write, yourself."

"I used to do perfectly grand poetry," she admitted.

"Show it to me?"

"Never. I would die first."

"I show you my works."

"Yes; but yours don't deal with the softer emotions—if you know what I mean?" Diantha had a note of polished politeness that she kept for such questions. Wendell straightened up under it, squaring off bodily at the insinuation.

"I like that! Why should n't I know?"

"Because you train yourself not to."

"But, my dear girl, what else can I do, in my profession?"

Her headshake denied the necessity. "It 's better to be hurt now and then than to shut out warmth.

You said you ought not to love Border, just because it would be hard to leave him. Well—" she turned back the manuscript—"there—you did n't throw away your case of instruments because they lamed your shoulder; but it would have been a lot more sensible than to shut out affection because it may hurt your feelings!"

He took breath for lively argument, then slowly let it out again. It was several moments before the sober intentness of his gaze relaxed to a smile.

"You are a very wise young woman," he said. "What a lot of things you have pondered in your heart."

"Yes, I 'm rather ponderous," said Diantha foolishly. They laughed, less at the joke than because it was spring, and they were good friends, and the book was done; and Mrs. Brooke, writing to Sylvia, said,

They are laughing together on the veranda now. It does me good to see Di have such a nice time. I called there, dear—it seemed only proper when we were seeing so much of the son. And they have called here. I like them

very much. The young man is delightful, and his work is very celebrated, his mother tells me. They seem to have any quantity of money, but they are quite well bred.

"I think you would make a splendid explorer," Wendell was saying, out on the veranda. "You are game and good-humored and practical and intelligent—all you need is a little scientific training."

"It takes such sound health," she objected. "I can never overdo without paying for it."

He glanced at her meditatively. "Have you a good doctor?"

"Oh, people don't call in the doctor any more, do they? One simply goes to bed and gets over it."

"I am not so sure;" but he did not go on with the subject. "Would a day's exploring in a motor overtire you?" he added.

"No, of course not."

"Why should n't we, then?" Wendell rose. "We have done our task—let 's have a holiday." It was pleasant to invite Diantha and see the young joyousness spring up through her tranquil maturity.

"What fun!" she said.

Mrs. Brooke added a postscript to her letter:

Di and Mr. Wendell are going off in his car for the day to-morrow, if it is fine. What a pity that he will be home only a week longer. I should think his mother would hate to have him make these long, dangerous trips.

The next day was rainy and the second dubious, but the third began with fair promises and they set out early. That morning was to take on for Diantha, afterwards, a liquid shine, a beauty and glamour that could startle her pulses, and yet it was entirely unmomentous. The charm lay in her own mood. The secret, persistent questions of her inner life, the tangled human skeins that her mind was always trying patiently to unravel, were forgotten—might have been eternally solved, so drugged with content was her spirit. She did not even long to show it all to Conrad, a longing that usually cast a wistful shadow over all beauty. Little things amused them both inordinately. They tried unmapped cross-cuts and knew more than once the joy of being lost, and they were hungry to a comic degree when at last they found a place to lunch.

As they entered the inn, where other motorists were having late luncheon or early tea, Diantha's happiness drooped a little before a wish that, for Wendell's sake, she might be slim and lithe and rosy of skin, like the pretty ladies already there; she felt a confused apology towards him as she followed him down the dining-room. But he faced her across their table with so genuine a liking, so contented a friendliness, that the shadow had gone before he could suspect it; and, looking with clearer sight at neighboring tables, Diantha saw compensations for him in his companion. The pretty ladies were fewer than she had thought, and there were faces under shadowing veils that gave her a shudder of the soul.

A woman, seated with several heavy companions, roused up again the longing to understand that was Diantha's inner life. The make-up on her bold, handsome young face had as open a significance as the twist of white paper in a horse's bridle. Ignoring Wendell's companion, she fixed unshrinking eyes on him and stared until Diantha could have risen up, mother-fashion, to protect him. If he saw, he gave

no sign: not a line of his clean cut, soldierly brown face betrayed consciousness, his interest in what they said and ate showed no faltering. Only, when they stood outside again, she fancied that he drew a long breath. Was it of relief? Ah, there were so many things that Diantha might not know!

"I wish I had a brother," she broke out.

"Why?" he asked, with a smile for the coming reason. He liked Diantha's reasons.

"Because I want to know, I want to understand! And there are so many sides of life that a girl can't puzzle out by herself. I could ask him."

His smile deepened. "And you could n't ask any other man?"

"Well, not for another twenty years, I suppose!" with a sigh that made him laugh outright. He took her arm to help her into the car.

"What a nice girl you are, Diantha," he said, using her name consciously, amusedly, but quite without trepidation. She felt suddenly young and unsophisticated beside him, she who had so often hidden a mature smile for his boyishness. He was,

after all, a citizen of the world, knowing it variously, while only in her mind had she ever left her corner.

Wendell was looking critically at the sky.

"It is just as well that we brought rubber things," he said. "Would it be very bad for you to get wet?"

"I am not so feeble as all that," she declared, and tried to feel as she had in the enchanted morning; but the evil eye had been cast upon her mood. It must have touched all their world, for presently disaster was upon them, not one disaster, but trouble on trouble, highways closed for repairs, wrong turnings and blind alleys, a punctured tyre, a tragedy with a hen, and, at last, the rain to which the day had been graying. Wendell, who had grown rather grimly silent, stopped the car without comment and got out the rubber coverings. Diantha had tactfully obliterated herself since the hen episode, which had been unpleasant, but now, as he tucked her in, she ventured a one-sided smile.

"It was only a hen," she murmured.

"I don't mind the hen!" He thrust in the edges

with resentful force. "But I feel such a bungler, letting you in for all this. I know, in your heart, you 're wondering why on earth you came, and wishing to goodness the man would get you home—you know you are!"

She meditated. "You mean, your sister Agatha would be taking it that way."

"Rather. She 'd let you know it."

"Well, so would Sylvia, I dare say." She said no more, but his face cleared.

"It 's nothing to me, of course," he said. "This is all padded ease compared to what I shall be in for presently."

"And yet you would rather be up there alone, a thousand miles from civilization, with only a canoe between you and the wild rivers—"

"But think what I shall see!" His hands tightened on the steering gear. "I 've dreamed of that caribou migration ever since I was a boy. Think of it—millions on millions of caribou in one vast herd, solid miles of caribou. Does n't that take your breath?"

She considered it, tried to picture the mighty horde trampling south from Arctic pastures to the winter woods; but the thrill that startled her was for the lonely young figure braving peril and hardship, daring the wilderness for long months, that he might at last stand on an eminence and look down on endless caribou.

"It 's splendid, splendid," she said, and the catch in her voice satisfied him.

"They come when they please," he went on. "I may have to wait till the end of October and come out on the ice. One man says they were six days passing him, day and night." He turned to her, boyishly excited. "It will be fun to tell you about it."

"And I had been thinking that getting caught in the rain was an adventure." She sighed for the tameness of her lot.

"It will be, if this keeps on," he said, with a glance for the lowering sky.

It did keep on. Presently they were laughing as a wild burst of rain streamed down their faces and found its way in through their coverings. They

might have taken shelter, but dinner time was already past and they chose to keep on. There was excitement in the struggle: the blood of youth was racing as they charged up hills and flew down them. The last mile was a hilarious dash. As Wendell sprang down at her door and unfastened Diantha's coverings, their eyes laughed through wet lashes.

"I said you were a born explorer!" he cried.

The front door was thrown open and Diantha, who had risen, stopped short in the rain, staring; for on the lighted threshold, luminous in sheer white, smiling, blooming, exquisite, stood Sylvia.

"Well, Di," she said.

Diantha stammered, not understanding her own confusion. "Why, hello, Sylvia!" Her note of heartiness was difficult. She climbed down, conscious of her bundled clumsiness and the wet streaks of hair across her face. "Nothing the matter?" she asked.

"Oh, no. I needed repairs, and I was bored, so I ran home." She had not greeted Wendell, but now she half turned to him. "My mother says that you

are to come back here for some dinner," she said. She was not gracious—scarcely courteous: she seemed to toss the invitation to him, careless of his response. He faced her very straightly, then bowed with unsmiling formality.

"Thank you, I will," he said.

IV

EITHER the trip or the wetting had been too much for Diantha. All the next day she lay in a darkened room, miserably beset by what the family had come to accept as "one of Di's attacks." Usually she bore them with cheerful fortitude, but this time she retreated into a dark silence, from which her mother tried in vain to rouse her. Even the joyous surprise of having Sylvia at home could not bring cheer. Mrs. Brooke's happy dwelling on the unheralded arrival had been interrupted by a curt, "Why did she come?" that sounded almost hostile. The kind little mother feared that she had tired her poor girl, and slipped away.

Sylvia had wandered into the sick-room more than once that day, but her attention had been absent, and she had chiefly stood at the window, swinging the cord of the shade. It occurred to Diantha then that

there was a change in her twin. Sylvia had always seemed absorbed, but until lately it had been a happy absorption. Diantha shut her eyes and violently refused to care. She was in a wicked mood this long, gray day.

Wendell called in the afternoon and, learning that she was ill, sent up on his card a friendly message of sympathy and apology. Diantha could hear Sylvia's voice and his laughter on the veranda below until, in exasperation, she closed the windows. Seeing him with others had curiously changed his status. She had come home that wet night with a delightful boy, whose adventurous courage gave her a motherly pang of pride, whose straight young manhood was racially dear and precious; and then, between the candles of the dinner table, she had seen him transformed into a personage, a figure of mature importance, a man of the wide, grown world who had found time to be kind to a simple neighbor. Mrs. Brooke treated him as though he were the father of all geography, Sylvia took the trouble to be amusing; and Diantha had sat silent, bewildered at the loss of

her nice boy and wearied with the eternal effort to understand.

He came again the next day, but she was still shut in her room. He had brought a book this time and a note, written in the square, clear hand that had grown so pleasantly familiar.

"Please get well and come down, or I shall go off feeling like a murderer," he begged. "To-morrow will be my last day, as I leave at dawn Saturday. How can I start if you don't wish me luck?"

"Oh, Sylvy can wish it to him," was Diantha's silent comment.

It was hard to keep her room the next day. She was too well for bed to be endurable, but she put on a wrapper and refused to come downstairs. There was a grim joy in being inaccessible; never before in her disciplined life had her behavior been wholly that which is called feminine. She saw Wendell cross the lawn in the late afternoon, and her heart beat wildly as she waited for his card. When it came, she sent down a perfunctory message.

"Tell Miss Sylvia," she added.

Sylvia had perhaps needed no telling. A few minutes later, Diantha saw them strolling down the lawn together, Sylvia all in white from her parasol to her shoes, but making no visible effort to entertain the guest. Her half absent air seemed to say that it was quite enough for him to be there. Wendell showed himself equally relaxed, with eyes lifted to the elms and hands hung in his coat pockets, but his ease seemed to Diantha the alert ease of courage in the presence of danger. He was evidently to be shown the view of the river from the old rose arbor, a rare view that took long looking at when Sylvia condescended to show it. Diantha tried to forget about them, but a passion of curiosity held her at the window. What might not that hour of river and sunset and gnarled old roses accomplish? Would Sylvia continue to assert her indifference, or would she turn "nice"? No one could be as simply, cleverly, delightfully "nice" as Sylvia when she was present minded and happy, and sure of the upper hand. But would Mark Wendell yield her that? Attracted he had been, clearly; but Diantha had seen

him as a fighter with his path chosen before him. In the manner of their return, she would read the results. She waited so intently that a knock on her door made her heart vault.

"Open, dear. It 's your dinner," said her mother, and brought the tray in herself. She fussed affectionately over Diantha's comfort and appetite and, before she had gone, Sylvia's step passed in the hall.

"But what on earth does it matter to me?" Diantha demanded of her childish dismay. Wendell had sent a message to know if she would be down in the evening. Diantha, incomprehensively peevish, returned that she would not. And there was an end of that.

The blue brick house was astir early the next morning. The door of the garage was rolled back before five o'clock and Border, excited, apprehensive, rocketed between the house and the motor, acting out a conscious fiction that he was going, too. Wendell was kneeling on the gravel, tightening the straps of a canvas sack, when an arm fearfully, reluctantly, parted the lilac hedge and Diantha looked

through. She had had to come—guilt, remorse, the nameless foolish miseries of a sleepless night had driven her forth; but her approach suddenly reminded her of Border's abject crawl through that very gap on the day of the stolen cake, and so Wendell, looking up, saw her with eyes full of unwilling laughter above an embarrassed flush.

"Diantha!"

She had never met quite so impetuous and wholesouled a welcome. It swept away the embarrassment, the secret resentment, even the memory of Sylvia. She left her hands gladly in his, aware only that the distinguished personage of the past few days had again become her nice boy comrade. He evidently did not suspect her recent sulks, for, "Ought you to have done this?" followed with quick concern.

"Oh, I am all right. I had to come; we have had such good times."

He did not deny that working over his manuscript was a good time for her. "Haven't we!" he echoed. "And I thought I wasn't to see you again!"

Happiness made her mischievous. "But, in your profession, you have no business to care even for a friend," she told him.

"Don't throw my youthful follies in my face. When one finds a friend like you, one does n't let her go."

"Even if she hurts your shoulder," she completed it. His laugh rang out.

"Ah, I like you, Diantha. You have such a nice mind. It is good to know that you will be here when I get back."

"Oh, I 'll be here;" her slightly wry smile was for her own diversion. "Now I must n't keep you."

He reluctantly admitted it. "Will you say a friendly word to Border now and then?"

"I 'll spoil him," she warned, stooping to the little dog. "Ah, good-bys are horrid. I wish I had n't come."

"But it is worse not to say them. You don't know how it mattered."

"I suppose so." She straightened up, giving him her direct, grave glance as well as her hand.

"Well, success to you, and enjoyment, and a safe return."

"And what to you?"

Her smile was sturdy. "I don't know. Peace, perhaps?"

"Peace be hanged! Health and happiness, then. And will you say good-by once more to your sister?"

"No," said Diantha, and again they laughed.

"Never mind, then. Good-by, Diantha."

"Good-by, Mark." And then the hedge sprang back between them, and the world on Diantha's side of it seemed rather empty.

Sylvia went that day, unsmiling and inscrutable, and outwardly the place settled down to its summer quiet; but to Diantha the days that followed were full of a new unrest. She could neither work nor read. She was always going to the window, as though she watched for something: a bell, or wheels on the gravel, set her trembling. And yet the suspense seemed to have no meaning. There was nothing in the wide world coming to her. Even when, one late afternoon, she found Conrad on the steps,

that was not the end of the waiting. Her joy was shadowed by the disappointment in store for him.

"Oh, Conrad—Sylvia is n't home!" she exclaimed.

"I know it. I 've come to see you." He kissed her hand with his usual air of gaiety, and for the moment she was very happy. On trial for his life, Conrad's manner would have expressed cordiality and a readiness to laugh. Away from him, Diantha sometimes wondered how spontaneously this geniality bubbled up, how far it was consciously maintained: wondered, also, if every one on whom it poured felt as sure of his affection as she did; but in its presence she knew only its reassuring charm. She placed him in a vine-curtained end of the veranda and brought iced tea, then sat opposite him, erect and smiling.

"Well, I know all your news," he began. "You 've been ill—poor dear; and also you have been collaborating with a handsome young explorer."

"How mean of Sylvy! She might have left me something to tell."

"Oh, she did n't volunteer it: I dragged the facts

out of her. I saw her on Sunday. You 're such a good sort, Di;" he held out his hand to her across the table. "You know, I 'm awfully fond of you."

There was a little pain in it, but there was much happiness, too, and Diantha, out of her long discipline, could show that alone as she responded. "Dear old Conrad," she said; then, as she realized that his hand was hot and dry, she looked at him more keenly. The spirit in his face had until now hidden from her how gray and lined it was. Her glance was met, but tacitly refused admission.

"Tell me about your beau," he commanded, heaping sugar into his glass with absent lavishness.

"He would n't thank you for that title," Diantha assured herself as well as him. The absurd old appellation had given her a foolish and reprehensible stab of pleasure.

"Is he so desperately charming?"

"He is a very nice boy. Conrad, don't put in any more sugar; it will be horrible." Her troubled glance still questioned; but she was trying to believe that he, like others, was simply looking a little older.

"Oh, did I take some?" He tasted, but forgot to notice. "Tell me, what is this Wendell like?"

"Why, he is rather the young war lord;" she smiled over a militant vision of him. "Disciplinarian. Hard edges. And yet—not hard in the center: not a bit. There 's something brave and bright about him, something—" she hesitated for the precise term, too happy in the task of setting Wendell forth to notice her hearer—"something dominating, yet at the same time dear and boyish. He—"

The crash of Conrad's chair interrupted. He had started up, overturning it. As he stooped to right it, she saw that he was shaking.

"Conrad!" she breathed. He faced her bravely.

"It is all over, Di. I wanted to tell you. We have had it out for good, Sylvia and I. She never can. It 's ended."

"Ah, I 'm sorry!" The tenderness of her voice, tenderness rooted in years of smothered pain and ignored longing, brought him down on the bench beside her.

"I know—bless you, Di. I 've been pretty faith-

ful, have n't I? But it was no use. Now I am going to get over it. Pull it up by the roots. A man can't hang on forever." He had dropped his head between his hands, and the very disarray of his hair, usually so fashionably smooth, hurt Diantha past bearing.

"Sylvia is a fool," she burst out.

"Oh, no, my dear. Love comes, or it does n't. There is no blame about it." He lifted his head and squared his shoulders. "It is n't illusion with me, either. I know Sylvia right through—where she 's fine, and just where she 's a naughty girl." He smiled faintly. "Nothing changes it. I had to come to you, Di. I wanted you to know."

"But, Conrad—" her fear was almost too dire to be worded—"you won't drop away? You will still come?"

"Not where Sylvia is." He rose and went to the edge of the veranda, looking out between the vines at the setting that had so often framed Sylvia for him. "I 'll come and see you when she is away," he added, but there was no heart in the promise, and she knew

that it was good-by. She accepted dumbly. When presently he said that he must go, she did not urge him to stay. She stood on the steps to smile and wave until he was gone, then she went heavily up to her own room.

The gulf between Sylvia's lot and hers, lying side by side, yet so sharply different, presently drew her to the mirror. She seldom looked in it more than necessary, but now she put up the window shades and stood full in the glow of sunset light, asking the eternal questions. Sylvia's fine eyes were there, the good height, her own sweet and humorous mouth, but the blight that had fallen on her childhood was all that one saw.

"Fat and dingy," she said with honest courage. "'The wrong kind.'" Then she bent forward, a startled frown in her eyes, to draw out a strand of dull brown hair. Till this moment she had not seen a stealthy invasion of gray hairs, still half hidden, but posted throughout, ready to take possession. "Upon my word!" she muttered, carrying a hand-glass to the window for better certainty. She found

them from every angle, and accepted them without resentment. "So be it," she said, putting away the glass, and prepared to put away the whole subject. But suddenly she laughed, forlornly, yet with conviction. "Oh, what a joke on my twin!"

The discovery acted like a powerful snub on the obscure restlessness that had wasted so many days. The next morning Diantha went briskly at a host of neglected duties. The postman's visits did not even interest her; and so it was not until afternoon that she discovered the letter lying on the hall table. Wendell had said nothing about writing, yet she knew, by the shock of seeing the familiar square, clear writing, that this was what she had awaited.

It was a long letter, and the beginning was unmomentous. Wendell spoke of the wild country about him, and wished that Diantha could see the beauty of lake and sky that lay before his camp.

I am always wanting to show things to you [the letter went on]. Everything I see or hear—a bear's track, the call of a loon, an Indian village, a new river—is for you. I find myself turning to you fifty times a day. I can hear you catch your breath and—excellent trait!—say

nothing at all when it is especially fine. And I can see your tranquil little one-sided smile over the hardships. You are not at all like a modern girl—do you know that? But perhaps I mean that you are not at all like Agatha. I never dreamed that a girl could be such a companion. You say you are not strong, but I am certain that a year or two of this sort of life—open air and freedom and adventure—would make you over new. You see now what I am trying to say. Diantha, why not? We are the best of friends, we have splendid times together—and you are so blessedly free from nonsense. I would expect nothing too hard of you, and you would not want to limit my work. I have thought that an explorer must not marry; but with a girl like you, a girl who would wait at the foot of the mountain, I don't see why that happiness need be denied him. You see, I have taken to heart your advice about the "softer emotions." I am not persuading myself into this because I want it. I can see, coolly and clearly, how life would be enriched instead of hampered—for us both, I truly believe. Will you marry me, dear Diantha?

You need not decide now. But write me at Fort Resolution, within forty-eight hours after receiving this. That will be my last chance to get mail for several months, and I want to know that you are at least thinking kindly of what I have said. Good comrade and warm friend, I want you in my life.

Yours, dear Diantha, if you will have me,

MARK WENDELL.

Diantha read the letter a second and a third time. She even held it closer to her eyes, as though to find some little word that had escaped her. Then she let it drop through her fingers, and her eyes slowly filled. A hurt gasp broke from her. She started up and tried to walk away from the pain, clenching her hands against it, steadying her shaken mouth. Then she fell to scolding.

"You 're a fool, Diantha! What did you expect? It 's a fine, honest letter—there is nothing to howl about. Oh, you make me tired!" Abuse gradually brought her back to outer tranquillity, but could not stop the sick ache of her whole being. She felt no resentment against Wendell. He had done his straightforward, manly best in telling her that she, with her blessed freedom from nonsense, would not hamper him, and she recognized that he offered far more than life had led her to expect. But love renounced had never left her in such desolation as this offer of friendly affection. For Diantha knew how men could love. Years ago, pausing at a window, she had heard Conrad's voice on the veranda outside:

"But I want you, Sylvia—I love you, I want you in my arms!" The broken, smothered, stammered plea had lived in her heart ever since, at first as a dire wound, then as a precious bit of knowledge, a key to the forbidden door. Now she was asked to ignore her knowledge, to throw away the key.

And yet it would be a good life, she told herself, and drew a deeper breath at the thought of it. After all, why not? Conrad was gone out of her days, and no man would offer her more.

"Good old Di—she doesn't expect things: she 'll wait at the foot of the mountain," she said with bitter derision; and then she saw Wendell smiling at her across the inn table, and faith in him, pride in his straightness, brought a new stab of pain. This everlasting diet of half loaves!

She must answer within forty-eight hours: before Friday. She read the letter again, and suddenly realized, as an ominous sign, that there was not one word of Sylvia. The thought that perhaps he had run to Diantha for safety, that he would bind himself to her as to a solid mast, to defeat the charm of

spoilt modern Eves, brought the blood to her face. The idea, once admitted, would not be driven out. It shamed and angered her. Hot though the day was, she presently ran down into the garden and sought her spade. She must work herself into some sort of peace.

The sun blazed down, and her mother, shielding her head with a magazine, presently came after her to protest. Border, crawling forlornly under the hedge in search of consolation, lay in the shade with panting tongue and watched her out of half closed, knowing eyes.

"Do you really think you are wise, dear?" persisted Mrs. Brooke.

"No: I think I 'm a great fool." Diantha planted her spade with vicious energy. Then her arms dropped. After a blind interval, she turned towards the house, stumbling. As from a long distance she heard an anxious voice, and then other voices, and felt the welcome strength of supporting arms helping her to a couch. Familiar miseries, magnified a thousandfold, swept over her in waves of pain and sick-

ness, so that the mind forgot everything but the tortured body, and what seemed the immediate approach of death.

"This is serious," she said, and saw that they knew it.

Hours of tangled horror went by. Unfamiliar presences appeared, vanished, came back again and took charge of her. A strange man went through a form of consulting her; she consented indifferently to anything. They might cut off her head if that would bring relief. There was a journey, passed between vague sleep and drugged apathy; then a frightened waking in a strange room, with nurses busy about her.

"Oh, is it Friday yet?" she exclaimed. She was told, soothingly, that Friday was a long way off, but presently she repeated the question, so anxiously that an older voice commanded,

"Find out what is troubling her, Miss Green."

"It is a note that must be written," Diantha explained, more collectedly. She realized now that they had been taking off the wraps in which the jour-

ney had been made, and that the strange, dreadful day was still not over. "If I wait till after, perhaps I can't. I must write it. It has to go before Friday." She had a despairing feeling that they would oppose her, put her off, and could have cried in gratitude when she found writing materials placed in her hands, and a book held to give her steadiness. The pen crawled uncertainly across the paper:

Dear Mark:

I have your letter, but I am not very well, and so can't answer it now. Thank you for it. Good luck always.

DIANTHA.

She saw the letter stamped, sealed and carried away, and then, relieved of all earthly concerns, weary and indifferent, she gave herself up to the waiting oblivion.

V

"YOU look better to-day, honey-bunch!" The nurse stood at the bedside looking down possessively, as at something of her own creation. Her plump, white face in its frame of little black ringlets was all kindness and cheer. Diantha stirred uneasily, closing her eyes.

"I suppose I am," she said listlessly.

"My, yes. We only need to get you chirked up a bit now. How about a cup of tea?"

"I can't take tea, thank you. It keeps me awake."

"Feel like a nappy right now, sweetie?"

Diantha gasped, as for air. After a pause, she murmured, "I 'm all right. Do rest yourself, Miss Grayson; you must be worn out."

"Oh, ho—you can't wear out Grayson!" The nurse laughed and comfortably settled down to the business of cheering her patient. "The merry heart

goes all the way, you know. It is n't any credit to me: I was born like that."

"I am cheerful when I 'm well," Diantha was goaded into explaining.

"Of course you are. There 's often a touch of post surgical neurasthenia—down in the dumps, you 'd call it, dear. You 'll feel better when we get a little flesh on you. My, but you 've gone off in these weeks!"

Diantha muttered a helpless protest. Her amazing thinness had been her one comfort in all this dreary experience.

"You 're thinny-winny now," Miss Grayson pursued. "I used to call my sister that when we were little. She was thinny-winny and I fatty-watty." Her hand followed her generous curves with honest satisfaction. "I always was one for nicknames. I get them for my patients now—is n't that funny?" the kind voice went on. "There was one I always used to call Star-Bright. She suggested that, somehow. And another was Ladybird—I could n't tell you why—she just was. 'Ladybird ready for her

breakfast?' I 'd say. She thought it was awfully cute. I don't know just what name would suit you."

Diantha's arm had dropped across her face and she said nothing, but the question of a nickname was not pursued. Miss Grayson rose with the briskness of a good idea.

"I wonder if you would n't like a cup of tea!"

"No, thank you. I don't drink it." Diantha forced herself to look up. "I don't need anything just now."

"Well, darling, I 'm right here if you do."

The patient's arm again hid her face. "O God!" It was a silent gasp of nervous exasperation.

Diantha had come back to the safety line slowly and reluctantly, with many pauses, and crossed it with a poor grace. She had not wanted to recover. Nothing that lay ahead looked to her exhausted sight quite worth the long climb up to health. She was very patient, very courteous to those who served her, but the strength that was returning to her body did not seem to reach her spirit. The only feeling she

had shown had been on her mother's account. Mrs. Brooke's presence in a city sweltering in August heat had distressed her daughter so keenly that the doctor had finally sent her away.

Sylvia had come during the worst of the danger, and Diantha had seen her with dim surprise, forgetting how momentous death looks to those who are not close to its cool peace. Sylvia must have stayed weeks in the hot town, and she wrote from Bar Harbor her readiness to come back at any moment. Diantha realized that she would have been touched at this, if she could feel any but peevish emotions. Conrad had sent flowers, but she glanced at them without interest and turned her head away. To be let alone seemed the supreme good.

Miss Grayson left the room, and Diantha relievedly gave up a pretense of sleep. The high, white, blank walls, the clean, blank room, suited the vacancy of her heart and mind. But she was not to be left in peace, though the disturbance this time did not come from without. A strand of hair had fallen across her eyes, and she had put up a thin hand to

brush it away when it caught her feeble attention. She stared, unbelieving, pulling it out into plainer sight. Then she drew down the hair on the other side. All round it was the same, a soft, thick gray. In the weeks of illness, the invasion had been completed. She was twenty-six, and gray haired.

The long apathy broke. Suddenly she cared, bitterly. Her hair had been a stupid, dull tone, but at least it had been a color of youth. It was softly, newly abundant where it had been thin—but it was gray. Tears came, slipping down one by one under her closed eyelids.

"Kyin'? Why, sweetheart, what does this mean? Are you in pain? No? Well, well, what can we do for the girl?" Miss Grayson was patting the bed-clothes, all kindness and sympathy, and Diantha was filled with shame at her own savage desire to strike. She drove back the tears.

"It 's nothing. I 'm just nervous," she faltered.

"Well, of course. Here 's a package, darling. Perhaps there 's something real nice in it." Miss Grayson undid the box and took out layers of tissue,

artfully working up the suspense. When it was clearly hopeless to rouse enthusiasm that way, she unfolded a dressing gown of rose and white silk, with rose ribbons and lace frills, sent with Sylvia's love. A vision of herself in the delicate garment brought a grim smile to Diantha's face, but it was the first time she had smiled at all, and the nurse was delighted.

"Now you 'll have to get up, to wear the pretty kimmy," she declared. "Don't you want to try it on?" She shook out alluring folds, shimmering and scented, but Diantha turned away, closing her eyes. "Well, some day soon. There 's no hurry. Now," with a pause for suspense, "what if I were to get you a cup of tea?"

"Oh, all right, I 'll take it," said Diantha on a long breath.

The apathy that had been so roughly disturbed would not come back. Diantha clung to its outer aspect, but her spirit was inexorably waking up. She began again to wonder. No one had spoken of her gray hair: was that to spare her feelings, or because the color of Di's hair did n't really matter?

And why on earth, since the prospect had not disturbed her, was the fulfilment so distressing? Conrad was a dim memory, Mark Wendell a forgotten incident; why should n't her hair be gray? She took herself in hand again, scolding with some of her old humorous vigor. She had just brought herself to the declaration that the time for self indulgence was over, that henceforth she would be her cheerful, interested, disciplined self, when the door opened and Miss Grayson's bright face peered round it.

"Peek-a-boo!" she called.

Diantha burst wildly into tears. She cried like a child, helplessly, racked by sobs, indifferent to pattings and coaxings, smelling salts and drinks of water. Poor Miss Grayson, at the end of her resources, started to get the head nurse, but stopped relievedly as the doctor appeared in the corridor. He listened to the tale of the inexplicable hysterics, then went alone into Diantha's room, closing the door after him.

She was gasping exhaustedly when a strong hand closed professionally on her wrist.

"This won't do, you know;" the voice was easy-going, comfortable, a little whimsical, yet one to be obeyed. "Now there is n't any one here but me. Suppose you tell me just what 's the matter."

Diantha began to cry again. "She says 'Peek-a-boo' at me," she stammered. "I can't bear it—no one has a *right* to say—'Peek-a-boo'—at me! She is so kind—but she will call me darling and sweetheart, and I can't seem to stand it. If she would n't c-cheer me up—oh, and she is so good, and I 'm such a beast to hate her!"

The doctor did not laugh—then. Later, "Peek-a-boo!" was to be his daily greeting, but that was when she could laugh, too. Now he was all gravity and understanding.

"Why in thunder have n't you told me before!" he exclaimed. "My dear girl, that can be remedied in an hour. I know just the person for you." He had risen, but she caught his sleeve.

"But I can't hurt her feelings!" She was all ready to cry again. "She has done everything; she had been devotion itself. How can you—"

"That 's—all—right." His voice and his upraised hands forbade her to concern herself with his responsibilities. "I 've got a case I 've been wanting her for—she 's a wonder with children. Only I did n't like to take her from you. I 'm going to promote her, not fire her."

"And she won't suspect?" Diantha drew a mighty breath of relief. "And the new one won't call me darling? Oh, I am a beast. And probably every one but me likes it!"

"She will call you Miss Brooke," was the emphatic answer.

An hour later a quiet young woman, pretty and gentle, was in charge of the room. Diantha and Miss Grayson had had an effusive parting.

"I hate to leave you; but the doctor can't do without Grayson when a child gets bad," the nurse explained, blithe at the prospect of the ordeal before her. "This little girl has had an intestinal obstruction—swallowed a button, dear, and they had to operate. It 's too serious to refuse."

"Oh, of course. And you have been so kind."

"Oh, that 's nothing. And I have chirked you up a bit?"

Diantha smiled. "Yes; you have chirked me up all you could."

"Well, good-by, darling." And then a peace so deep had fallen on the sick-room that Diantha had drifted off into a happy sleep.

Little Miss Connor smiled instead of speaking, and moved with effortless quiet. She asked no decisions of her patient. She could even inflict pain without the incessant, "Does it hurt?" that is so trying to strained nerves. And she took what was to Diantha an amazing interest in her charge's appearance. Hair, skin, hands, all received such devoted attention that presently Diantha, newly open to amusement, made fun of her.

"You ought to have been a beauty doctor," she said.

Miss Connor was tying up her hair—her gray hair! with a pink ribbon that she had brought with her that morning.

"Well, when you can be a beauty, why not?" she

asked, carefully fluffing the hair about the temples. Diantha winced a little, for the other's sake. Miss Connor had said such things before, no doubt from a kindly desire to please a patient; but she seemed such a straight, true little thing that the flattery jarred.

"You talk great nonsense," she objected; but she let Miss Connor get out Sylvia's dressing gown in preparation for the doctor's visit. A tinge of autumn freshness was in the air. There was, after all, a certain pleasure in being alive. As she slipped her arms into the flowing sleeves, she looked with satisfaction at her slim shoulders.

"I don't weigh any more than Sylvia, now," was her thought. Miss Connor had finished her work, and stood off looking at it with such open admiration that Diantha laughed. "I 'm sorry you have n't a better subject to work on," she said.

"I don't want a better," was the emphatic answer.

The kindly flattery had at least served to awaken curiosity. A shy desire to see herself and know the worst beset Diantha. She had always refused a

handglass, and she would not ask for one now, but, when the nurse left the room with discarded linen, she set out for the foot of the bed, whence she might face the large mirror of the bureau.

"I must look a ripe fifty," she warned herself with a touch of her old humorous courage as she made the difficult six-foot journey. She arrived breathless and a little dizzy, and granted herself a moment's respite, leaning on the footboard with closed eyes. Then she slowly opened them and turned to the mirror.

It was very puzzling. That could not be Diantha! The mirror lady had gray hair, to be sure; but it was the soft gray of a young cloud, that only heightened the delicate youth of the face it framed. Diantha was dim and dingy, but the clear, pure skin of the other was touched with Sylvia's rose. All Sylvia's beauty of feature seemed to be there, lit by Diantha's spirit. There was some mad illusion. She strained forward to shatter it, to see truly, and the woman in the glass bent forward, too, anxious, frightened, and yet—lovely.

"Of course, I 'm crazy," announced Diantha, suddenly calm and matter-of-fact. "I 'm seeing what is n't true. I have dreamed of it until I have affected my brain. Such things don't happen, that 's all." Then, hearing a step outside her door, she slipped back to her place as easily and lightly as if weakness, too, had been an illusion. The doctor found her with shining eyes and bright cheeks. He consulted her temperature, then stood smiling contentedly down on her.

"Decided to get well, have you?" he observed.

"I thought I would." Questions rushed to her lips, but faltered there. She could not ask the least of them. And, seeing how unsurprised he was, how serenely unconscious of any miracle, her heart sank. Surely he who had known her as she was must have shown a daily amazement, if her mirror and little Miss Connor spoke the truth.

"I 'm utterly crazy," she decided; but she began to regain her strength at a marvelous pace. There was a reason to get well, now; she must stand close to that mirror, and know.

Mrs. Brooke was ill with a cold and did not come to town that week, but Diantha wanted no one. Her whole being was bent on its task. She first stood a brief moment on unsteady feet. Next came slow steps, with the nurse's arm, and half hours in a chair. Presently she was making unsteady ventures by herself, while the house up the river was in a ferment of happy preparation for her return. And at last, one bright September morning, when the nurse had made her as fine as possible and left the room, Diantha walked bravely up to the mirror and asked her question.

The answer came back like a shout. The mirror lady shone out upon her, slim and fine and utterly lovely. When the clogging flesh had gone, it had uncovered the lines that were the beauty of Sylvia. The blight that had fallen like a malicious enchantment on her childhood had been swept away, and Sylvia's skin was not more softly white. Sylvia's clear eyes looked back from the mirror, and Diantha's own beautiful, wise mouth panted there, trembling.

This was not madness or folly. She had come back to her own.

"Hullo!" The doctor stood in the doorway, eyeing her amusedly. She turned to him, lost to reserves.

"Do you remember what I looked like when I came here?" she blazed.

"U'm, h'm;" the easy-going assent had a soothing intention.

"Do I look like this now? Or am I crazy?"

He glanced from her to the image. "I should n't call you crazy," he drawled.

"Then I 'm—I 'm like Sylvia!"

"Beat her hollow, I should say. Your face means more. Hello—what now?" For a tragic shadow had fallen on her new loveliness. She caught his arm as though she were in bodily danger.

"But when I 'm fat again—" she stammered.

"But you won't be." He led her to a chair, and stood in front of her to deliver a lecture on hygiene, describing the poisons that had been at work in her

for years, and their defeat when the source of trouble had been removed. "Fat is often a sign of disease," he concluded. "You have been ill all these years, only you were naturally so strong that you did n't know it, except when you had an 'attack,' as you called it. Now I 've cured you. Taken the disease out. You 'll stay so." She sat taking that in, wondering over it, revelling in all her being. Presently she came back to him with a start.

"Could you have cured me long ago? So that I grew up—like Sylvia?"

"Of course I could have—if you had had the sense to come to me."

She dropped her face into her hands. "All those years!" was her despairing thought. In the days of her deprivation, she had scorned self-pity, but now, richly dowered, she was stricken with an anguish of sorrow for the girl Diantha. "I can't bear it," she gasped.

"Look here, now," began the doctor reasonably. "You 've come out something of a beauty, I grant;

but I don't see why it matters so much—to a sensible girl like you."

She turned on him with quick fierceness. "Because now I need n't be so everlastingly sensible!" she flung back. Then she softened again. "Oh, when the dream of your life comes true—what happens?"

VI

DIANTHA'S heart was very full as the car, cleaving the brisk sunshine, sped towards home. The return to the living world, to river and woods and dwellings and fellow beings, with the beloved old house at the end of the journey, was of itself joy enough; but to be going home transformed —to have gone into the dark a dull bulb and to have come out a blossoming lily—was to live romance beyond the dreams of starvation. She carried home her new loveliness as she would have borne any exquisite gift that was for the happiness of all: in her heart, she ran to her mother and sister, tremulous for their joy as well as her own. So would the enchanted princess, delivered from the form of a toad, have flown up the paths of the ancestral castle.

And the home-coming had been beautifully relieved of care. Aunt Eleanor, who had little

patience with failure in any form, and would not have concerned herself with her niece's funeral bills, showed her approval of the good fight won by paying all the hospital expenses. So the burden of guilt which had begun to fit itself to Diantha's shoulders was mercifully lifted; the family would not be called on for sacrifices. Her miracle was without flaw. Suddenly she clutched the wrist of Miss Connor, who sat beside her in her usual sympathetic silence.

"Can you sing?" she demanded.

Miss Connor partly understood. "No," she smiled. "I can't do anything good enough."

Diantha sank back again. "I wish I were a boy choir in a cathedral for about ten minutes," she said from her full heart.

They stood on the steps waiting for her, her kind, eager little mother and a grave, silent twin. Diantha saw them through mist, touched beyond words by the welcoming warmth. Miss Connor was to go back in the car, but Mrs. Brooke insisted that she stop for a cup of tea, and poured herself out in happy volubility. Diantha, lying in a deep chair, her long

cloak thrown back, waited, smiling and trembling, to be discovered. Her suit had hung about her so absurdly that she had come home in Sylvia's dressing gown, not sorry to confront her family in what was so delicately becoming. As yet, they had not really looked at her: they were too moved to see her with clear eyes. She stole the chance to look at them, and so felt the touch of shadow. The summer had left a visible mark on her mother: she was an older woman. Sylvia, too, showed a change. A bad cold had left her thinner, and her brilliance was subtly dimmed. She attended to the tea with automatic courtesy, and Diantha was startled by a hurt conviction that, even now, her thoughts and her heart were miles away.

Miss Connor went, and at last they were free to turn to one another. Diantha, looking into their eyes, met smiles, but not the expected leap of amazement. Her mother took her hand and gently stroked it.

"Well, little girl!" she murmured.

"My hair is gray," said Diantha suddenly.

"I would n't mind that, dear," Mrs. Brooke comforted her.

"I know an excellent woman, if you want to have it restored," Sylvia offered.

Diantha, who had thought the soft, abundant gray cloud quite beautiful, turned troubled eyes from one to the other. "I 'm thin," she said faintly.

"Of course, dear, after such an experience. But I think she looks very well—does n't she, Sylvia?" Sylvia's stare was vaguely puzzled.

"It 's the dressing gown," she said. "You ought to wear pink, Di—it 's becoming."

"Now I want Di to go to her room," went on Mrs. Brooke. "Are you equal to the stairs, dear?" They seemed to have done with the great topic. Diantha rose, standing before them in her wistful slimness.

"I have changed so very much," she pleaded.

"Not to us, my dear girl," said her mother. Sylvia was gathering the tea things, and did not heed. Diantha carried her bewilderment to her own room and, when she was left alone there, tried to smile over

it, the dry little trained smile that life had taught her. But amusement, though due, would not come.

"Is n't any one going to see it but Miss Connor and me?" she demanded hotly.

Fortunately, she was too tired to wonder very long. A deep sleep wiped out her grievance. When she awoke, it was enough to be in her own home, with her mother beside her. Mrs. Brooke, happily released from inaction, went to see about her child's supper, and Diantha heard her send Sylvia to take her place. Her twin came in with the new listlessness that this year had developed.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

Diantha's smile recognized Sylvia's effort to do her whole duty by the sick. "Oh, I am all right," she said. "How are you?" Then, as Sylvia made no answer, she added an unthinking, "You are a little thin, are n't you?"

Sylvia turned on her with frightened sharpness. "Then I have gone off? You see it?"

"Gone off? What nonsense!" Diantha ridiculed the idea with honest heartiness, but Sylvia was

not reassured. She merely retreated into herself again, as though the truth that she knew were too dire for any words to reach her. Mrs. Brooke, returning, found the two sunk in the incomprehensible silence of which this generation was capable. In her day girls had talked as they breathed, inevitably and without pause, to her a much gayer state of things. She was innocently glad that she was there to cheer and divert them.

Diantha's strength came back very rapidly. It seemed only a week or two before she was running about the house, rejoicing in her new lightness, buoyant with health and happiness. The bright autumn world spread out before her shining with possibilities, but she would not look forward, and as yet her illness hung like a blank wall between her and what had gone before. It was enough just now to be alive and beautiful.

"How well Di looks!" was Mrs. Brooke's daily exclamation, and presently she came to a wondering, "How nice you look, dear!" In Sylvia's glance there was sometimes a hint of surprise, a coming sur-

prise rather than surprise actually present. Diantha laughed to herself and bided her time. Meanwhile, the old routine seemed to be gradually reëstablishing itself: Sylvia's beauty gave her the rights of a career, and to serve this career was her family's duty and privilege.

"I appear to be good old Di, just the same," was her amused thought when Sylvia, returning from a gay week, confidently brought her a lace gown to mend.

"You would do it so much better than I," she had the grace to say. She seldom forgot the proper speeches.

Diantha had a mischievous inspiration. "My dear Sylvia, I am just coming to you for help," she said, as calmly as though that were a normal proceeding. "Every garment I have has to be made over. Would you mind doing some ripping for me? I will mend your gown after my things are in order," she added to the blank silence that had followed.

Sylvia's astonishment nearly upset her gravity; but she kept her eyes lowered and busily went on with

her dressmaking. Sylvia slowly sat down, more slowly accepted the scissors, and, with an air of still offense, ripped a stitch or two. Diantha flew at another garment.

"It is dear of you to help me," she said gently.

Sylvia unbent a little, and the scissors moved with more earnestness. After ten minutes of silent work, she held off and looked at the gown with new interest. It was a brown silk, of a vintage three years back.

"Why do you bother with this old thing?" she demanded.

"Old thing! It is my best gown, I 'd have you know. It has always been considered very handsome."

Sylvia examined it again, then dropped it with an expressive toss and left the room. Presently she came back with an armful of softly tinted satins and crêpes. "These are gowns I have given up, but perhaps you could wear them while you are thin," she said. "They are better than that, anyway."

They certainly were. To Diantha they looked so fresh and smart that she protested.

"They are rags," was the firm answer. "Try them on."

Diantha's pulses quickened as she stood before the mirror, her clumsy flannel blouse exchanged for long folds of soft, dim ashes-of-roses crêpe. The gown fitted as though it had been made for her, and its perfect lines, its air and finish, seemed to lift her into another sphere of life. Yet her joy in it, after one quick flutter, drooped and died. She smoothed her hair and invented small delays before turning. A nameless reluctance had seized her. For some unacknowledged, aching reason, she shrank from revealing to Sylvia what she had seen in the glass.

"The back is very nice," commented her twin. "Turn round."

Diantha turned, trying to smile. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes had a shamed tenderness. They seemed almost to ask forgiveness.

It was a true instinct. Sylvia saw her at last—her slenderness and grace, the lovely, unspoiled youth of her face and the distinction of the gray cloud that framed it: saw the shining spirit lighting the beauty

of line that till now had been all hers. Perhaps she saw, too, her own dimmed, pale, frightened face in the mirror beyond, for she recoiled, and her hands sprang defensively to her cheeks. Then her training came to her aid and cut short the dreadful moment.

"It looks very well," she said curtly. "Take the others, too. Of course, when you are fat again—"

"Oh, yes, then I could n't wear them;" Diantha was eager to assent, to hasten back to her gray flannel. But even its clumsy outlines could not now hide her from Sylvia's awakened eyes. They stared again, widening and darkening; then she left the room and did not come back.

"And I thought it would be fun!" mourned Diantha. She thrust the dresses out of sight. In her contrition, she could have shaved her head and marked her face. Sylvia's wound ached in her breast all that long morning. She had the lace dress wonderfully mended, as an apology, when the summons to luncheon opened Sylvia's door. Sylvia could have had anything she wished of her twin, had she come out in a barely approachable state of mind.

But Sylvia was frozen, blank, implacable. Under her silent hostility Diantha's heart gradually stiffened to a righteous resentment.

"Sylvy ought to have her ears boxed," was the final conclusion that ended her secret apology. When Mrs. Brooke asked her, afterwards, if Sylvia seemed to her quite happy, she answered with unexpected vigor.

"Spoiled people seldom are."

"Di, dear, that is not fair;" Mrs. Brooke was shocked. "Sylvia is very unspoiled, considering. You don't understand the temptations of great beauty."

Diantha slowly absorbed that; then her eyes softened to a twinkle, and she kissed her earnest little mother. "I hope to, soon," was her incomprehensible answer.

Diantha's strong instinct was to beg off for other people, to understand so poignantly their temptation, or their goading pain, that the offense was imbedded and lost in a warm surging up of forgiveness. Sylvia had to be a very naughty girl indeed to bring

about the state of things that lasted all that week. Even as it was, Diantha's expressed conviction that her twin needed discipline had sometimes to be held by force against the blighting knowledge that Sylvia was very unhappy.

"Well, I have been unhappy, and I did n't take it out on her," she argued, and put down an instinct to wear her most graceless clothes. She shrank from the gowns that had made the trouble, but one night, hardened by Sylvia's persistent aloofness, she put on the plainest of them, a quaint little frock of dull blue velvet with an enormous lace collar and cuffs. It was cruelly becoming; and, meeting her own grieved, reluctant eyes in the mirror, she had a sudden memory of Mark Wendell, erect and militant, scolding her for shielding a sinning dog. The vision brought a laugh and a quickened beat of pulses.

"I can be stern, you see, Mark," she assured him, fluffing the soft hair about her forehead. Then she pushed away the thought and went downstairs. She was not yet ready to remember Mark Wendell.

The drawing-room was lighted only by the fire.

Her mother, who was sitting by the hearth, turned with her ever ready welcome.

"Well, Sylvia?"

"It is n't Sylvia," said Diantha, coming into the light. "It 's only Sylvia's gown." Then, as Mrs. Brooke continued to stare without speaking, she tried to laugh. "We shall have to go back to the pink and blue bows if you mix us up, Mother."

Mrs. Brooke passed her hand over her eyes. "It is the light," she said. When Sylvia came in, she turned to her with a lurking bewilderment. "I called Di 'Sylvia' just now!" Sylvia, after a sharp glance, refused to see her twin.

"Well, don't call me 'Diantha,' " she said languidly, lighting the gas by the desk and sitting down to her letters. The papers were occasionally rustled, but little writing was being done. The air was electrical with suppressed storm. Diantha, sitting very still under the palpable currents of hostility that traversed the long room, was amazed to see her mother draw a chair to the light and peacefully spread out the evening paper. It seemed impossible

that any sentient being could be unaware of the tension and pain about her.

Mrs. Brooke read aloud an occasional item. Presently a fresh page drew from her a startled exclamation.

"The old general has gone at last," she told them impressively. " 'General Horatio Livingston, in his seventy-ninth year.' " She read aloud the details, then straightened up with judicial severity. "If he has not left a good sum to Conrad, I shall know what to think of him," she announced. "No son could have been more patient and devoted. I am sure his own son never was." She launched out into the Livingston family history, and the chances of a moderate fortune for the general's kindly nephew, but it was evident to Diantha's keen eyes that Sylvia barely heeded.

"All those years of devotion—and she scarcely remembers that he exists," was her bitter thought, and her exasperation came dangerously close to the surface.

Dinner was announced, and her mother left the

room. Diantha, conscious that Sylvia was waiting for her to go, suddenly grasped the situation.

"Sylvia, do you object to my wearing these gowns you gave me?" she demanded.

It was one of Sylvia's good traits to meet honesty with an honest response. "Yes, I hate you for it," she admitted, after an instant's pause.

"Because they are becoming?"

"I suppose so."

"But why on earth should you care?" Diantha spoke with impetuous resentment, and the answer was flung back:

"Because I am a pig, I suppose."

"Why be a pig?"

Sylvia put away her letters and rose. "I should think you would understand," she said at last. "It is as if you were taking something that—is n't yours."

"But I am not taking it from you!"

Their looks crossed. "I am not so sure," said Sylvia in a low tone.

It was no use: Diantha could not be consistently stern. Sylvia's frankness had unhorsed her chal-

lenging anger, and now the shadow on her twin's face, its pale, worn anxiety, brought her down on her two knees.

"I 'm sorry, Sylvy. I will give them back. I did n't want to wear this, anyway." She had put out her hand, but Sylvia turned away.

"What does it matter? What is the good of anything?" she said.

Diantha, left alone, slowly lifted her two arms.

"Lord, I thank Thee for every moment of discipline, for every earthly good thing I have not had," she said solemnly.

Sylvia was more approachable the next day, though the indifference that was succeeding her hostility was scarcely easier to bear. The new life in Diantha's veins cried out for expression: she longed for friendships, for shared interests, for excursions into fresh fields. She began now to understand that she would never have withdrawn from life so completely, after that one failure, but for the lurking poison of illness, the secret drag that checked initiative. Always, before, she had felt unequal to

life. Everything she had done had been accomplished in spite of an acute longing not to do it, not to put forth effort of any kind, not to dare. She had scorned herself for a lazy coward and driven her lagging spirit smartly through the small daily round of home life, believing that all workers had to fight the same mighty desire to lie down; but she had shrunk intolerably from the thought of venturing into the outside world. And now, day by day, the outside world was shedding its terrors. Once a dark and hostile labyrinth, it began to seem as bright and easy as a garden. Daring plans for breaking loose from home kept her awake nights. She did not want to go out and earn her own living—the old Diantha might have planned that; she wanted to enter into her regained kingdom, to shine before men, to meet lovely women as an equal. And to every one who had ever known Di Brooke, she longed to show the radiant miracle.

Invitations still came addressed to the Misses Brooke, but they were laid with Sylvia's mail, and the form of showing them to Diantha had years ago

been abandoned. Diantha felt guilty, as though she were robbing the mail, the first time she picked up such an envelope and opened it. A start had to be hidden as Sylvia appeared in the doorway.

"We are asked to a tea at the Country Club, Sylvy," she said, forcing herself to speak naturally. Sylvia's glance flew to the envelope, and had made indignant comment before she realized that Diantha was within her rights. She turned away from the proffered invitation.

"Those teas are deadly," she said.

"I think I should like even a deadly tea," said Diantha, the new current in her veins betraying itself in wistful humor.

"You would have to go in a hired carriage, and that looks too foolish;" Sylvia had an air of closing the topic, but Diantha persisted.

"Why foolish?"

"Because it is disproportionate. If you can't drop in in your own car, or be picked up by some one who is going, it is not worth while. It would look as if you had n't anything else to go to."

"But I have n't," said Di. "And I want to go. I want you to lend me the hat that went with the crêpe gown and to take me to the party. Please, Sylvy." It was a new note from Diantha, this mischievous appeal; a new power lay back of it. Sylvia's quick glance was uneasy.

"Don't be absurd, Di. Of course you may have the hat—keep it; but don't expect me to stand about on that stupid lawn, talking to college boys and middle-aged husbands."

The prospect made Diantha laugh. "But I have to go to something," she explained.

The tea frankly obsessed her. Life-long acquaintances would be there, old family friends and connections, young married women who had successfully "come out" the year that Diantha made her tragic venture. They had never known her, though many of them called her Diantha. She had stayed in her corner and they had flitted past, seeing her only as the quiet twin, the plain one, who did not go out. To appear among them with a right to their welcome would be a delicious adventure. She was

that rare phenomenon, a person whose wildest dream has come true; her very presence must be valuable, spreading the glad conviction that nothing is too good to happen. When the day awoke her, warm and brilliant, her heart ran over with secret songs—songs of the joy of health and the love of friends and the power of woman.

"I am coming, you enchanting world," was her silent greeting; then she laughed. "You *are* an old fool, Di," she admitted, and went down to breakfast.

Sylvia was telephoning as she passed through the hall, and the usual, "Then you will call for me," made Diantha thoughtful.

"Who is taking you where?" she asked, when her twin followed her into the breakfast room. The question was contrary to all family precedent, but Diantha was daily breaking precedents. Sylvia marked her surprise by a pause, but she answered.

"Mrs. Morton—to a luncheon."

"I thought perhaps it was the tea at the Country Club, and that if I stood out in front, looking very fine, she might take me, too," Diantha explained

with the unwonted sunny audacity that made her seem like a stranger in the house. The mention of the tea plainly worried Sylvia.

"You would n't enjoy it, Di; you would be bored to death," she insisted. "It is all very well to drop in, if one happens to, with others; but you can't make a solemn pilgrimage to it by yourself."

"I see," said Diantha, though she didn't at all, then; she only wished rather sadly that her twin could understand what it meant to have all your youth pent up inside you unused. It was chance that presently made her ask, "Where is the luncheon?"

A flush rose in Sylvia's face, but was instantly put down. "At the Country Club," she said surprisedly, as though Diantha should have known. "Mrs. Morton is receiving at that stupid tea, so I suppose I shall have to stay and help her. She has done so much for me, I could n't refuse."

Diantha's pause had a shocked stillness. Then, "I see," she said again, but drily, and from a great distance.

The old Diantha would have left the matter there, without further comment or action; but with the new health had come a new force, and Sylvia's desires were no longer law. Presently Diantha spoke, in a tone of cool reasonableness.

"Why don't you want me to go, Sylvy? I should n't tag, you know, or bother you. And I have perfectly good manners—no family need be ashamed of me. I can't see why you object."

Sylvia cast aside the paper she had been pretending to read. "But what is the sense of going?" she returned as coolly. "There will be no one there that you could marry."

Diantha literally jumped. "My dear girl!"

"Oh, yes—very unrefined and all that," Sylvia assented. "But, in heaven's name, what else does a girl of twenty-six go about for? I have been to those things, year after year—I 've been to everything; and it is not worth the trouble. When I found a real man—he was not at a tea."

Diantha had forgotten herself before the revelation. "Then you have found one?"

"Yes; but I doubt very much if he has found me. But—to go back to teas—take my word for it, there is nothing in them."

"Ah, my dear!" The force of her protest took Diantha to her feet. "There is human friendliness, nice hands to shake, things to laugh over,—giving out your ideas and getting theirs—sparkle, stimulation, good time! Why, Sylvy, just to sit opposite a pleasant person in a train makes me happier. And to spend an afternoon with them, in pretty surroundings—I don't ask anything better."

Sylvia sighed. "How young you are!"

"You have never starved," was the quick answer. "Anyway, I am going, this afternoon."

"Do as you like;" Sylvia washed her hands of the affair and went away, leaving Diantha to wonder over the revelation of bleak emptiness in her twin's rich looking life. Who the real man might be, she speculated in vain; but she could not take the unhappiness very seriously. Sooner or later, Sylvia always got what she wanted.

When Diantha was dressed that afternoon, she

went and stood expectantly before her mother. Sylvia had always liked this gown and hat of dim old rose, but she had never looked so lovely in them as Diantha looked, with her shining eyes, and her wise little smile of self derision. Mrs. Brooke visibly gasped.

"Why—Di!"

Diantha's laugh came out. "O Mother, don't you think I 'm perfectly beautiful?" she cried.

Mrs. Brooke stared, and covered her eyes, and stared again. "Why, Di, I do!" she said solemnly. Then her face clouded. "But, of course, Sylvia—" Diantha kissed her.

"Oh, yes, Sylvia is the family beauty," she assented, and drove away sobered. If only one person would realize what it meant to Diantha, would be wholly glad with her!

Whimsically mindful of Sylvia's objection to hired carriages, Diantha dismissed hers at a lower gate of the grounds, and walked slowly across the links towards the groups about the club house. Summer warmth and autumn radiance gave the pic-

ture an enchanted setting. Diantha felt no shyness, but her heart seemed to be beating down in the bass.

"I am about to be born," she told herself. "I shall 'swim into their ken.' This is romance, real romance, and I am living it!"

A murmur ran through the group nearest, and heads turned at her approach. "Who is that lovely thing?"—she distinctly saw the words on lips that had once let fall in her hearing, "Ah, yes, very plain —poor Diantha—and nothing whatever to say!" and her smile broke out. She stopped and offered her hand.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Van Ness."

The hand was taken and retained while the puzzled lady stared. "Of course, you are a Brooke twin," she declared; "but you are not Sylvia, and you are not Diantha, and I did n't know there was a third!"

Diantha pressed back a laugh, and others took up the theme: "Why, but it is Diantha! It can't be! But who else—!" She turned to them, trying not to betray too flagrantly the fun of being born.

"It 's Diantha," she explained. "I have been very ill, you know. That—changes one."

Their tact made them hesitate to show all their astonishment until a frank, plain, boyish-looking girl put the general feeling into words: "If you could just tell one how to catch that illness!" Diantha joined in the laugh that followed, the stored up friendliness of her heart streaming out to them. She had so much to give them! All the repressed years had been providing her for this moment. And it seemed to her that she could give without words, just by standing there and being her lovely new self.

"I am sure it is very nice, Diantha, and I am glad you are so well," Mrs. Van Ness was saying. "Tillie, who is that coming in with the Whartons?"

Tillie told who it was, with details, while Diantha waited for the trivial interruption to pass. She could not suppose that the identity of the Wharton guest would turn them from a living miracle. Not till the group began to break up did she realize that her moment had come and passed, that they had taken in all they were open to and gone back to their

own interests. When she found herself quite alone, she moved on to other familiar faces and made her little sensation over again, and again found herself congratulated and then forgotten. Sylvia, pretending to be busy at the tea table on the veranda, had always a group about her, and any stranger was taken up to be presented; but, for all their admiring cries and words, they let Diantha go past. Before their perfect unexpectancy, her new power sank away. She was the quiet twin, the failure, the one who had nothing to say and who did not go out. Slowly and unbelievingly she came to the disheartening truth that a person may outgrow an ineffectual youth, may live it down before the world, but to his own people he will be always as he was in the beginning. A new beauty, with nothing else to give, might have taken this little community by storm, but Diantha Brooke, grown beautiful, was still only good old Di.

"Nothing turns out the way you think it will," she admitted, and in the forlornness of her disappointment she went to Sylvia for shelter.

"You were quite right," she said, trying to speak humorously. "I 'm having a horrid time. I could be so fascinating—but they won't give me a chance." They stood together conspicuously at the veranda's edge, and many smiles commented on the likeness and the contrast. Diantha did not notice, but her twin winced.

"Why do you stay?" she asked.

"I—don't know." Diantha, diving brilliantly into the new element, had provided herself with no means of return, but she did not care to say so. "I suppose I expected to ride home on the shoulders of the crowd," was her derisive thought.

"Well, I have to look out for strangers," Sylvia said, in faint apology for moving away.

The sun's departure had called the glory from the gray, and presently darkness and chill began to send the motors streaming off right and left. Sick with a childish longing to be taken care of, Diantha slipped through the club house to the door that opened on the high road. To summon a carriage would mean a long wait, and three miles on slippered feet seemed

to her vastly easier than carrying a smile any longer. Only she must not be caught in the act—toiling absurdly through the dusk in her rose crêpe. The thought of being exclaimed over and taken in was intolerable.

The road was clear but for a runabout, coming from the direction of the city, and Diantha waited in the shadow of tall shrubbery to let it pass. Even before it had reached the lights at the drive entrance, its outline, or that of its only occupant, had taken on familiarity. It came to a stop at the gates, and Diantha pressed forward. In the gladness of her relief, she felt as if she had been bodily picked up and comforted. Everything would be all right now, for Conrad was here.

Then she halted, understanding falling on her spirit more coldly than the night air on her unwrapped shoulders, for the car was being quietly and skilfully backed off the road into the shadow of a giant maple. That done, the lights were put out, and she knew that the figure lost in the shade was turned towards the gates, watching and waiting.

Conrad would not go where Sylvia was, but he would wait outside for the chance of seeing her go by.

Conrad had seemed very far away since her illness had snapped off Diantha's old life and started her on a new one, and she had no philosophy ready for the gust of misery that this sight of him brought. The old Diantha had had no worse moments; for though a starved love may in time die, its ghost can always walk, and experiences lived down in the mind, go on echoing in the tenacious body, which will tremble and weep in the very face of the mind's cool denial. Diantha, shivering like an outcast in the bushes, was gripped by a strangling homesickness—homesickness for the old, disciplined, unexpectant past, wherein content was a simple daily duty, and holding a man's affection was almost satisfaction enough for a woman of sense.

To be caught now would be worse than ridiculous, for she knew that the most casual word of kindness would let loose the tears she was fighting down. Stealing over the deserted lawns, she climbed the wall at a shadowy corner and set out for home.

VII

IT was a proof of Diantha's fundamental soundness and wholeness that, half way home, she laughed. She had caught the picture of herself driving forth with flying banners to conquer the world, then tramping forlornly back in the dark, and though at first she tried to ignore it, clinging to her miseries, the hardy discipline of years would not let her off. It was a small laugh, but a genuine one.

"I wish I could tell Mark about it!" followed impulsively. She knew just how Mark Wendell would take the tale—laughing reluctantly, inclined to scold her bad management, manfully indignant that he had not been there to look after her. The thought of him was so heartening that she sharply put it away.

"Nice boy," she said aloud, to mark the gulf between them. She had not yet forgiven the hurt of his letter.

Several cars and carriages had passed, each sending her in panic to cover. She was still a long mile from home when a welcome clatter and rattle announced some plebeian vehicle that need not be dodged. A belated grocery wagon pulled up at her hail.

"Ride? Sure thing," was the cheerful answer; then the light of the lantern fell on her upturned face, and the youth spoke in a new voice. A shy and knightly care for her comfort betrayed how he saw her. He was a chinless, shock-headed lout, without discoverable intelligence, and yet it is a sober fact that his admiration did more to heal and restore Diantha than all her life's accumulated wisdom. He set her down at her own door, refusing recompense, and she went in smiling. An anxious mother awaited her.

"My dear girl! What became of you?"

Diantha's glance passed to her twin's averted face. Sylvia's attitude protested that Diantha's movements were not her concern—but protested too much. Diantha saw uneasiness, and had no wish to increase it.

"Oh, horses are slower than cars," she said lightly.

"But the stable had n't orders to send for you," Mrs. Brooke persisted. "I called up, I was so worried."

"I 'm sorry! A very pleasant young man drove me." Diantha laughed and turned to the stairs, dreading lest her dusty feet betray her. "I don't know his name."

"Did he have a big chestnut horse and a very small groom?" Sylvia asked.

Diantha's eyes met hers, not denying some mischievous secret. "I did n't notice a groom," she said, as though searching her memory.

"But was it quite proper, dear?" objected her mother.

Diantha laughed again. "You forget my gray hair," she said.

"Oh, by the way, Di," Mrs. Brooke's voice stopped her at the stair head; "the caretaker next door was asking for you. I don't know what he wanted."

The message troubled Diantha. The house next

door was closed, empty but for the caretaker and Border, and Diantha, trying to console the bereft little dog, had become good friends with the solemn, precise McGraw. If news had come of the absent son, dire news by telegram, McGraw might wish to consult her about its transmission to the family in Europe. Mark well and cheerful could be kept at arm's length; but the thought of the fine young life trampled out in the wilderness would make any woman quail. Diantha struggled through a pretense of dinner, then slipped out a side door and round to the back of the big brick house, where the kitchen windows showed a light. Her appearance startled McGraw.

"I took ye for a wraith," he explained, removing his pipe. "Or, at least, I did not, but a foolish person might have, ye looked that white and sudden." His calm speech made her panic seem absurd.

"You wanted to speak to me," she began.

"I did, miss. I thought ye might be so good as to look at the little dog Border." McGraw rose stiffly and drew out Border's bed from under the table.

"He 's been straying and got his lawful punishment, but as he cost good money, I 've a feeling of responsibility."

A ragged, battered outcast, hot nosed and limp, replaced the usually trim, alert, self-respecting Border. His break from respectability had lasted only a few hours, but it must have led him into lurid adventures, to have brought him so low. At Diantha's caressing voice, the tail stirred and eyes drowned in self pity were rolled up.

"He thinks he 's dyin', but he 's likely to pull through," was McGraw's unfeeling comment.

Knowing the love that lay between the dog and the man in the wilds, Diantha was more inclined to take Border's view of the case. That Mark might come back to find his little comrade dead was a possibility that wrenched. Border showed a wan appreciation of her rubbing and comforting, but when she held his jaw and dosed him from a large spoon, he turned from her with a shudder of the soul.

"If he is not well in the morning, we will have a veterinary," Diantha said, and went away with

reluctance. Working over Mark's dog had felt inexplicably good. She would have spent the night by him, could she have done so unobserved.

The morning found Border prostrate with the mysterious ills that attack well-bred little dogs who stray. A note was sent to the married daughter of the house, to whom McGraw had orders to report any difficulty, and a veterinary was summoned. Remedies showed little effect, and by afternoon all Border's airs and affectations, his poetic sensitiveness and aristocratic reserves, had fallen away: he was just plain dog, too sick to care. Diantha had spent the greater part of the day with him, and after dinner her family found her preparing to go out in the streaming rain.

"McGraw is willing enough, but he is old, and he does n't love Border," she explained. "We must pull him through if we can."

Mrs. Brooke expressed vague anxieties about shut up houses and damp, but Sylvia cut in with an impatient,

"I don't see what you can do!"

"I can stay awake, for one thing;" Diantha was lighting a lantern. "Don't be frightened if I come in very late." Her going plainly irked her twin.

"I would not sit up half the night for any one's dog," she exclaimed. "I think it is strained, silly."

Diantha looked up from the lantern with a tolerant smile. "Why should n't I have a folly or two? I don't mean to be always sensible, now that I 'm so handsome." The light, thrown up on her face, brought out the inner glow of the spirit. This day's work over an ailing dog had left a surprising impress: she stood strongly, like a person conscious of a new power. Some recognition of this made Mrs. Brooke say,

"You would have made a good trained nurse, Di."

Diantha remembered Miss Grayson, and shuddered. "Oh, no. I could never 'chirk 'em up,' " she protested. "But I 'd make a perfectly bully mother," she added, stepping out into the rain.

Border never allowed it to be forgotten that he would love no one except his master; but he showed a touching relief at Diantha's return. She rubbed

and dosed and comforted, and saw the little dog grow easier with a relief that was oddly stirring. The bright, tiled kitchen seemed richly pleasant. Ten o'clock came, but she was miles from sleep.

"You go to bed," she said to the nodding McGraw. "I will stay with him a little longer."

McGraw went with alacrity, but came back to say that if she wanted a book, Mr. Mark's study was full of them. Diantha could not pretend to herself that she wished to read, but the desire to see Mark's own quarters, once admitted, grew overwhelmingly.

"Why should n't I, Border?" she argued, gently rubbing the limp spine. "McGraw has given me a perfectly good excuse, if any one ever finds out. And no one will—people don't come to shut-up houses in the middle of a pouring night. When the lady goes to the man's rooms in the play, it makes a scandal; but the man in the play is n't up by the North Pole. He is right there, my dear, and the other woman, or the pursuing husband, is in the wings, about to dash on. Here there is no one who

could mind. My mother would say, 'Don't,' but she could not give any good reason why. Everything private and personal would be put away. I am not prying. I simply want to see the place where Mark—" The dog had started under her hand. He tried to lift his head, and she felt him tremble. She looked over her shoulder, half frightened, before she realized the cause. "You poor little man! Was it his name—Mark?" Again the quiver shot through the tense body; the eyes rolled wildly, asking why the beloved name was spoken, if the master was not there. The excitement seemed to pass into Diantha. "I 'm sorry, Border; but I love you for it," she whispered. "Oh, little boy, where do you suppose he is? Has he seen his caribou yet—'solid miles of caribou'? Is he all right? And does he think of us?"

Border drooped back into apathy and sleep, and Diantha sat beside him, lost in thought, forgetting how the night was going. At last she rose, very softly, and took her lantern.

"There is no earthly reason I should n't," she said

to a vague image of an objecting world. "And even if there were," she added firmly, "I would do it just the same. I have been proper quite long enough. Now, then!"

The swinging lantern sent flickers of light dancing up paneled walls and over squads of shrouded chairs. The stale chill of the air and the empty silence made Diantha falter at the stairs; then the homely sound of rain on the windows gave her courage to go on.

The study door opened on an inviting aroma of leather, faintly tinged with tobacco. Diantha closed it after her, but stood close to it, smiling unsteadily over the adventure, not quite sure that some irate figure would not rise up to demand what she did there. When she dared look about, she forgot her nervousness in satisfaction. The room was just what she wanted it to be, solid, manly, a little bare, but deeply comfortable. The leather chairs were pleasantly elderly, the couch had an inviting hollow worn at one end. There was one picture, hung over the fireplace, an inspired vision of a mountain. Di-

antha, holding the light to it, smiled to herself, knowing how often Mark's thoughts must have climbed it, as he sat beneath with pipe and dog. Then she turned to the books that lined the walls, taking them down at random, but looking more at the strong, square "Mark Wendell" on the fly leaf than at the contents. Here and there a boyish, unformed signature made her smile again. It pleased her to find books characteristic of the man, but pleased her still more when they were not characteristic. How could so active a spirit read Trollope? And yet the copies were well worn. She opened "Barchester Towers" with a thrilled sense of all that she and Mark had still to talk about. They had talked for hours, in the garden, on the veranda, and yet they seemed scarcely to have begun. She turned the leaves with a warming vision of reading to a tired man after the day's work: his pipe and dog, the fire and the deep chairs and the lamp, the splash of rain on the windows—how sweet it would be!

A slip of paper fell from the book, and Diantha bent to replace it. It seemed to be merely a clipping

from a newspaper article, but as she put it back the other side came uppermost, and Diantha found herself looking at the pictured face of Sylvia.

It was a familiar portrait, taken from a brilliantly successful painting, and dear to Sunday Supplements. It made Sylvia look as inaccessible as a princess, with quiet hands folded on her satin knee and head turned indifferently aside. Not even newspaper reproduction could mar the beauty and the distinction. Diantha slowly closed the book on it and took up her lantern. She was cold and tired, and sitting up with other people's dogs was a dreary business. Moreover, she had no right to be in her neighbor's study, prying into his affairs. She marched herself back to the kitchen, administered a last dose to Border, who was visibly better, and stumped home through the rain.

"The other woman did burst in from the wings," she muttered, trying to cheer herself after her usual sturdy fashion; but her exasperated self met the effort with a disconcerting, "Oh, shut up!"

She stole to her room, supposing the family asleep;

but she knew at her threshold that some one had recently crossed it. Proof followed the instant conviction: a shade, left down, had been rolled to the top, and the cushions of the chair by the window still showed a depression. She touched them, and found them faintly warm. The thought that she had been worried over, sat up for, sent Diantha to her mother's door. Little kind mothers trotting helplessly after big, oblivious modern daughters were always to her unbearably touching, and her gusty mood dropped to remorseful tenderness as she softly turned the knob.

"Mother," she breathed. There was no stir of response, and the lantern showed Mrs. Brooke contentedly asleep.

Diantha's puzzled glance turned to Sylvia's door, but it showed no light, and the idea of Sylvia worried and staying up for her was merely funny. "Who 's been sitting in my chair?" she murmured, echoing the beloved Three Bears of her childhood; but her room gave no answer.

Diantha slept late in the morning, and before she

was dressed Sylvia came in. Her first shocked thought was that Sylvia, pale and strained, looked scarcely even pretty, and it fortified her with a mighty patience for what might come.

"How is Border?" That was not what Sylvia had come for, but Diantha answered as though her twin cared.

"He was much better when I left. He is going to be all right."

"Where is he?"

"In the kitchen." She spoke unsuspectingly, not seeing where the question led.

"Then what were you doing up in Mark Wendell's rooms in the middle of the night?" The sharpness of the pounce made Diantha flush. "Your light was there for a long time," Sylvia went on. "I could n't sleep, so I came in to see if you were home. Why did you go up there?"

The charge was so unexpected that Diantha caught up any reason. "McGraw said to, if I wanted a book," she began; then the relief in Sylvia's face made her conscious of what she was saying. "But

I did n't want a book," she corrected herself. "I simply wanted to see Mark's study."

"Why?"

Diantha felt that the folly of the night before must be written on her forehead. "Curiosity, I suppose. I don't see anything so very dreadful about it, Sylvy."

"But what did you do there all that while?" Sylvia was in a curious mood; there was a glitter under her imperious questions. Diantha felt as if she had seen a knife's edge, and stared her own question so frankly that Sylvia shrank and turned away.

"I looked at the books," she said constrainedly, after a pause.

"Oh, well, it does n't really matter;" Sylvia had a hand on her forehead. "I am tired, Di—I did n't sleep. I have n't been really well since that frightful cold I had at Bar Harbor." They said polite and excusing things back and forth, neither hearing a word, and Sylvia went, leaving Diantha to explain away the scene with feverish denials. "When I found a real man—he was not at a tea," Sylvia had

said; but she met men everywhere, under all circumstances. She could not have meant Mark Wendell. If Mark had seen their mutual unfitness so clearly that he had run away from Sylvia, had even tried to safeguard himself with her plain and worthy sister, Sylvia would not lose that cool head of hers, would not give her heart where there was not one taste in common. It was unthinkable. And yet her watch-dog fierceness needed explanation. The proprieties were not so dear to her as all that.

"Oh, she is just cross," Diantha insisted, and pretended to believe it.

Border was so much better to-day that his own sufferings moved him almost to tears. He rolled stricken eyes, and gave his paw to be held, and whimpered of his pitiable condition until Diantha laughed outright.

"You are a posing little sentimentalist," she accused him. "As a person you would be detestable; and yet those very traits make you the dearest little dog on earth. Why are affected people so horrid, and affected dogs such loves?"

Border had no interest in the abstract. The dumb tale of his sufferings was told and retold. He would love no one but his master, but in this crisis he recognized the importance of some one to love him. Whenever Diantha laid down his paw, he gave it back, so imploringly that she could not resist. She was sitting on the floor by his bed, laughing down at him, when the outside door opened.

"McGraw, the little fraud won't let me go," she began, then looked up to find a strange woman regarding her with grave question.

She was not strange after the first glance. Though her figure was hidden in a loose cloak and a veil drooped about her head, she was unmistakably the Agatha of the painting in the drawing-room, the "beauty in the house" of whom Mark had spoken with such vigor. It was a worldly type of beauty: Diantha could not picture it without the elaborate curve of hair and the great pearls in the little fine ears, the smooth perfection of the skin, the imperious carriage. The energy that had made Mark an explorer came out in quick, restless speech.

"O Miss Brooke—you are Miss Brooke, of course? It seems odd we should never have met when I am always hearing of you." They shook hands, but she gave Diantha no chance to speak. "McGraw wrote me that Mark's dog was ill, so I ran out. He does n't look very ill, does he? Or does he? It is so hard to tell when they can't change color. Border has always detested me—but Mark is devoted to him. Men are so sentimental. It is really they who have the maternal instinct, don't you think? Tell me what I ought to do about the dog."

Diantha was looking on amusedly. "I think McGraw and I are doing everything," she was beginning when Agatha broke in.

"You are not at all like what I have heard of you."

Diantha showed her surprise. "But where have you heard?"

"Oh, everywhere. One does, you know. And from the family." Agatha seated herself to discuss it comfortably. "You have a sort of—oh—Newfoundland quality. Inside, I mean. I thought you

would be more like me—French poodle type." Diantha laughed out, but she was quite grave. "Is your sister like you?" she added. "Mark was crazy about her before he left."

Diantha felt a forlorn wish that she might share Border's inability to change color. Before she could produce her voice, the other had gone on.

"Mark is really a dear boy. He is frightfully steady and earnest, but you forgive it in him, don't you think? And if he were not, he would never survive those dreadful trips. Of course, exploring is like aviation: it can end only one way. Some day they will send us Mark's binoculars and his diary, and give him a column in the newspapers—unless he marries and has to stop. I wish your sister would take him, you know. We all do. Though we did n't dream of it until after he had left. Something he wrote back—I 've forgotten. It is years since he has gone near a girl."

"You have not heard from him, of course?" Diantha managed to ask. "It does n't matter to me,"

she was saying hotly to herself; "only I do think it is time that Sylvy stopped having everything!"

"Oh, dear, no. We shall not hear until he comes out." Agatha rose and stood considering Border. "Don't you think I had better take him down to a dog hospital? Then I could tell Mark that everything possible had been done—if it comes to Border's binoculars and his diary."

Diantha felt a jealous reluctance to letting her patient go. She believed that she had saved the little dog, and she could not bear to hand over her righteous claim to some impersonal hospital. Mark had hurt her, but he had given her much, and this was her return.

"I should like to finish the case," she said. "I am really taking splendid care of him. He will be as good as new in a day or two." Agatha was only too ready to yield.

"If you really want to be bothered with him," she added. "I don't pretend to understand it." They smiled at each other, recognition of a common

candor spinning the first filament of a bond between them. "I could wish that it had been you," Agatha said, putting out her hand.

"So could I," returned Diantha.

"Ah, but you must have such dozens." Agatha turned to the door. "I want to meet your sister some day."

"Won't you come through the hedge now and lunch with her?"

Agatha had a luncheon engagement thirty miles away. "I shall be hours late," she said unconcernedly, stepping into her car. "Good-by. Thank you so much for Border. You will come to see me when I am—"

The car was moving away, but she looked back to add, "Is your sister quite well again?"

"Quite," Diantha thanked her before the meaning of the question fully penetrated. Quite well again —Sylvia? That was the question people were asking about Diantha. Her mind raced back over the interview; she could not remember any definite word that had labeled her Diantha. Had Agatha heard

that one twin had beauty, and jumped to a conclusion? It was a startling thought, in the light of all that had been said. Diantha remembered every sentence, and waited breathlessly for her disturbed faculties to come back to their true balance and pronounce wisdom. She knew that they would never leave her with so cheering a delusion as that. And, in truth, they presently reminded her that Sylvia had been miserable with a cold at Bar Harbor, obliged to drop out of many festivities. "Of course. That is it," Diantha asserted, going slowly home. And yet—was it?

"Oh, what does it matter?" She flung away the topic, and in her hot revulsion flung Mark Wendell after it. "I will not give him another thought. I am sick to death of him and all his works. You are a nice boy, Mark, but from this moment you are nothing to me, and that settles it!"

It actually did seem to settle it. Diantha went on with a new freedom in her step. The desire to break loose, to go out in the world, surged up again, tugging at her like new wings on her shoulders.

Border grew well over night and, her occupation gone, she tried to make plans in practical earnest.

"If I want it enough, I 'll do it," she told herself. And then her mother's voice called from the hall below, joyously, foretelling good news.

"Girls? Di dear—Sylvia—where are you?" Both girls answered the summons, Sylvia leaning skeptically on the upper railing, Diantha coming half way down the stairs. Mrs. Brooke had a letter in her hand. "Your Aunt Eleanor is going to California," she announced. "She has Mr. Desmond's private car for five weeks, and she will take one of you. Is n't that splendid?" Her eyes were lifted happily to Sylvia. "Are n't you glad, dear?"

"Oh, thank goodness!" It was a cry of relief. "How soon does she start?"

"Next week. She says—"

A quiet voice interrupted. "'One of the girls?' Is that all she specifies?"

Mrs. Brooke looked surprised. "It is just a hurried note, Di. Here it is: 'I will take one of the girls.'"

"Then that could mean me," said Diantha, placidly seating herself on the stairs. "Do you know, I think it had better mean me, this time. After a long illness, a change is a good thing." Their astonished silence wounded and angered her, but she would not recognize it. "We will ask Aunt Eleanor, of course," she went on; "but if she would as lief have me, I really think it is my turn—don't you, Sylvia? You have so much change and fun."

Sylvia held herself in for a moment; then, as Diantha obviously waited for an answer, a little flame of her smoldering resentment spurted out.

"You know perfectly well she wants me—she always does. Besides, I need it most. You are n't half mad to get away."

"How do you know what I am? You never think of any one but yourself," Diantha flung back, rising. "Sylvia—Mother—it is my turn. I am young, too. We have always given everything to Sylvia, until now she is injured if a thing is withheld. I am a girl still—do you forget that? I want a glimpse of the world. I want to know men and women." She

turned passionately from one to the other. "I have kept still, and I have been patient. I 've never grudged anything, Sylvy. But have n't I rights? Could n't you allow me my turn without—making me—ask for it?" Her voice shook, but she stood strongly on her rights, demanding their recognition. Mrs. Brooke had dropped on a hall chair with little murmurs of distress and endearment, but into Sylvia's face, at first so white and angry, a light of shocked recognition was stealing.

"Why, Di, I did n't know you cared," she said slowly, the quarrel forgotten before the revelation.

"Yes, I have cared." Diantha came back to her, lowering her voice so that they practically stood alone. "I 've always cared, Sylvy, but it was just that you should have it. Now I 'm—I 'm not so—"

"Yes," Sylvia hurriedly put in.

"So I want a turn. I want a try at the world. Is n't it fair?"

The good stuff in Sylvia, that had always responded to discipline, was uppermost now. "Yes, Di, it is fair," she admitted. "You go." And she

went droopingly to her room, leaving Diantha with the bitter fruits of victory on her hands.

"I really think you are right, Di," said her mother despondently. "We have not considered you enough. You seemed so wise and mature—"

Diantha lifted her hands in protest and fled before any further heaping up of her intolerable gains.

Sylvia, at dinner time, was remote, but curiously gentle. Diantha would have given her the trip with a glad heart, if she could have approached the subject. Only Mrs. Brooke, telling what she had written Aunt Eleanor, had the simplicity to do that. Sylvia disappeared after dinner, but later she came to Diantha's room. She made no excuse for coming, but stood silently at the window looking out on cold, windy moonlight and the dark mass that was their neighbor's house. Diantha waited, holding back by main force her abject longing to call herself brutal names and to lay everything at her twin's feet.

At last Sylvia spoke. "When is Mark Wendell expected home?"

Diantha was startled into a flush, but it passed unnoticed. "About Christmas time, is n't he?"

"I wish he would come sooner," said Sylvia, and paused till the other could shape a breathless, "Why?"

"It has been very strange, between us. We attracted each other from the first moment." Sylvia dropped into a chair, her eyes hiding behind their lids, but her voice coolly casual. "I was growing frightened—about loving, I mean. I had begun to think perhaps I could n't. It would be so dull, just to take, and pretend. The first time I met him, I knew better. He was not my ideal in any way, and yet in ten minutes—I knew. And he knew."

"You mean—he loves you?"

"No. Not yet. He was fighting for his life." She smiled to herself. "I am not his ideal, you see. Oh, he is a fighter, Di!" Her eyes sprang open, shining. "Those three days before he went—you remember how I came back?" Di nodded, her face hidden by her hand. "I like a *man*. I thought he would crumple right up before me; for I had seen,

you know. I had found him out. But not a bit. He would n't give in one inch. It was harder every day. Tell me—you saw a great deal of him, did n't you, while I was away?" There was no alarm for Sylvia in that fact. Diantha's unimportance in her twin's eyes had never been made so unmercifully clear. She merely nodded. "Did he talk about me at all?"

"Never."

Sylvia liked that. "We had had some rather curious encounters. Oh, it has been amazing, Di! He ran away. But, after he has been months up there alone—well, we shall see." And Sylvia rose with a laugh.

Diantha could only stupidly repeat herself. "You think he loves you?"

"Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't: that 's why it is so hard. And that was why I wanted to get away, do you see? To kill the time. To be fresh and myself when he comes."

"You may go, Sylvy. I don't want it. I would rather you went."

"I knew you would understand. It is n't that I don't want you to have things, too. I will see that you get something. I promise it. But this is so important." Sylvia lingered at the door. "You don't mind too much?"

"No. It is right for you to go."

"Thank you. You 're a good sort, Di." She went out and Diantha, after locking the door, turned back with a gasp of angry laughter.

"Oh, I 'm a good sort—always, always a good sort!" she cried in passionate rebellion. For a wild moment, she thought of rushing after Sylvia with the simple fact, "He has asked me to marry him." But the simple fact would belie the complex truth. Mark had offered her marriage, but not love. He had merely clutched at her, as he was swept drowningly past. She shook herself free of him, body and soul, looking with hard eyes at his doom.

"You will make each other perfectly miserable," she assured him, "but it is no affair of mine, Mark Wendell!"

VIII

MRS. BROOKE met the news in the morning with a faint protest and open relief. It had been so long the family law that the best was for Sylvia; she could not adjust herself to any other standard. She was writing a second letter to Aunt Eleanor when an enormous car came sweeping up the drive with two men in front and Mrs. Chester Brooke inside.

Aunt Eleanor was a powerful woman of many successes and one gigantic failure. Her son Chester, with the best blood in the country to choose from, had followed some sad, low strain into worse than oblivion. Perhaps she had not been an easy mother for a weak son; success of every kind came naturally to her strong will, and she saw no reason why others should falter. Chesty's steady descent had finally cut all communication between them, and his name was never heard in her house. But righteousness

was still as simple as common sense, and moral blundering, like social blundering, an offensive stupidity; and she saw nothing incongruous in addressing a Mothers' Congress on the training of the young. "How I brought up Chesty," some unkind critic had described her speech; but she was not concerned with the humors of situations, and she had been in the right for so many years that the habit would have carried her past any criticism. To Diantha, always keenly conscious of the sensitiveness and complications of others, she represented a force that had its magnificence, like the rush of a privileged and luxurious passenger express. Her aunt's errand was clear from the moment Mrs. Brooke opened the door to her.

"Just who is coming with me?" Diantha heard from the stairs. "I could not make out from your letter. You have a confused style, Jennie. If Sylvia is going to mope as she did at Bar Harbor, I would as lief have Diantha, and it might do her good. That was why I left it open. How is she? It would be unwise for her to come if she is not

wholly—" Her glance discovered her niece hesitating at the threshold and silence fell with a shock. She could only stare until Diantha, flushing, broke into the familiar smile.

"Well, upon my word, it 's Di!"

Diantha had to laugh, but, conscious that Sylvia was following her, tried to bring down her aunt's voice by lowering her own.

"You did n't know me?"

"Of course I did n't. How should I?" Aunt Eleanor was not to be muffled. "Why, *you* are the family beauty now. Oh, good morning, Sylvia. Why has n't any one told me? Turn this way, Di; let me have a good look at you. You take all the color out of Sylvia. I declare, she looks quite faded beside you. How on earth did you do it?" Diantha's eyes implored her not to go on, but Aunt Eleanor knew no sign language. She did not see that Mrs. Brooke was distressed, and Sylvia blank to appeals. When she had taken every view of Diantha, she expressed her satisfaction, as always, in practical terms.

"Come down to town with me now and we will have some clothes rushed through for you," she commanded. "There is not a day to lose. Now don't protest. I like my guests to do me credit."

"O Aunt Eleanor," Diantha was flushing miserably, "Sylvia and I have been talking it over, and we think that she had better go. She is run down, and needs it much more than I do. So—"

"Nonsense, Di; I shall take you," was the cheerful interruption. "I am sure it is your turn. Sylvia has had enough done for her."

Diantha shivered, but Sylvia spoke with languid assent. "You are quite right, Aunt Eleanor. Diantha ought to go." So Diantha was hurried off to pack a bag. She tried to have a word with Sylvia before going, but her twin would not understand her desire, or meet her eyes. She left feeling sorely guilty. But the bright wine of autumn was in the air, the world was opening to receive her. Presently she turned to her aunt with a troubled laugh.

"I can't help being happy," she said.

To find herself standing in the center of a raptur-

ous group that knelt to adjust and stood back to worship and flew off to find fresh glories for her adorning—to hear additional satellites called in to share the wonder of good old Di's lines and carriage and beauties—Diantha could have screamed with laughter more than once that adventurous afternoon. All the long mirrors were needed to reassure her that she was not making an unmitigated fool of herself. She kept very still and tried to act as if she were used to all this, succeeding so well that Aunt Eleanor was wholly unconscious of any joke.

"You have an air, Di," she said approvingly, as they turned towards home. "I wish Pedar Sorrell would paint you—but I suppose he would discover some uncongeniality." Her brow darkened. "It is very hard to help young artists. I wanted him to paint Sylvia, but it seems she did not inspire him. Absolute nonsense, for a young man without a cent in the world."

Diantha was interested. "Is he talented?" she asked.

"He is Mary Sorrell's son, so I want to help him.

Talented? Oh, yes, I believe so. I will ask him to dinner, anyway. Is there any one you would like to have?"

Diantha said no; then her longing for some one capable of sharing the joke carried her past lurking difficulties. "I do want to see Conrad," she admitted.

"His uncle has just died, but I don't suppose that matters, with only ourselves." Mrs. Brooke was getting down at her door, majestically oblivious of the scurry of service that surrounded her movements. "Call him up," she commanded.

Diantha had not realized how good it would be to hear Conrad's voice, radiating pleasantness and welcome and joy in her recovery. He would break any engagement to dine with her; he would come that night.

"I have something to tell you," he added, with a sobriety that made her wonder.

"I have something to show you," she returned. He wanted to know what, could not wait. "Ah, well, you may not think so much of it," she warned

him. "Nobody is as enthusiastic about it as I am."

"Di—it is n't an engagement ring!"

She laughed. "No such luck."

"I could n't bear it," he admitted.

Conrad's acceptance was announced so buoyantly that Mrs. Brooke looked a surprised question; but Diantha was too happy to notice. It was part of the fun to let her aunt's maid arrange her hair and to put on the prettiest of Sylvia's gowns. Mary Sorrell's son had been sent for: "He will at least get a good dinner," Mrs. Brooke had said, resigned in advance to more whims of the artistic nature; and perhaps that thought had dictated the painter's instant acceptance. Diantha was glad that Conrad arrived first, and ran downstairs brimming with laughter over her mighty joke.

"Conrad!" she called.

"Good old Di!" He had started up to meet her, both hands out; then she saw the welcome stricken from his face. He shrank back, as though from an intolerable shock.

"Why, Conrad!" she faltered.

Her tone gave him back an outer show of self-possession. He shook hands and plunged into words, any words, caught up at random, disregarding the reproach of her grave silence. "Months and months, is n't it, Di! The last time was when I wept on your shoulder—you remember? It has been a perfectly horrid summer, has n't it? Summers like that ought not to be— Oh, Mrs. Brooke!" He went forward with relief to greet his hostess, and was so charming to her that presently he was led away to see a new painting. Diantha, hurt and angry, sat down at the piano and pretended to glance over a song, striking impatient chords.

"I suppose I look more like Sylvia than is pleasant," she admitted; "but he might have been a little glad for me. Nobody cares!" The last two words escaped on a quick breath, though she did not know it till a voice spoke at her elbow.

"How can they help caring?" it said.

Diantha started, lifting a face still revealingly open. An ugly little brown man was looking at her

with the sober candor of a child. She flushed, and then the absurdity of the situation made her laugh.

"That was not a *cri du cœur*," she explained. "It was only temper."

"But I care already," he persisted.

She liked the odd little person. In spite of his chubby face, undeveloped form and straggling hair, he gave her an impression of power.

"Would you jump for joy at my good fortune?" she asked. "That was what I was demanding."

"You have had good fortune?"

"Yes, wonderful. Beyond all dreams. No one ever had anything just like it, except in fairy books. A genuine miracle."

He sighed. "Please never tell me what it is. Nothing could be really good enough. It might be secret wings that you go flying about the earth on, or silver paths that let you run straight across lakes and seas by moonlight—your fact can never come up to what I can imagine for you."

"Yes, it can. It is as magical as wings and silver paths," Diantha said.

He shook his head. "It is only love, or money," he insisted. "There is nothing else for you—poor lady. But don't tell me which."

"It is neither." She laughed up at him, conscious that he saw her miracle, even if he did not comprehend it. "But it could not be told in words. It could only be—revealed."

He was not listening, though his eyes never left her. Their musing intentness was a new experience to Diantha, and she liked it amazingly.

"A body the color of flowers, and a soul to keep her sweet," he said. "Who said that—Stevenson? I want to paint you."

"But I am going to California next week."

"Then we must begin to-morrow morning. Ah, don't be conventional and talk about engagements. I hate all that. Why can't you just say 'yes,' and come?" His voice rose irritably. "You know that I can paint, don't you? Your aunt wants it—she said she did. What is the sense of making objections?"

"But I have n't, and I won't," said Diantha with a

gentle mockery of soothing that brought out his good, honest smile.

"Forgive me. I am not a gentleman," he told her. "I have read and heard dozens of definitions: 'A gentleman is one who—' you know; and they never fit me at all. 'A gentleman is one who does not show peevishness before ladies;' I am sure that is on the list somewhere. My mother was a lady—she could never understand how she came by me."

"If you paint well enough—" Diantha suggested.

"I do. Do you mean to say you have n't heard of me?"

"Ah, I am from the country. I don't hear things."

He had an honest stare for the discovery. "That 's funny. I thought I was famous. Poor yet, you know, but discovered. Well, never mind. It is only put off." He turned to Mrs. Brooke, who was coming back, followed by Conrad. "She will sit for me—she says she will!" he cried.

"Good evening, Pedar," Mrs. Brooke reproved his manners. "You know Mr. Livingston?" Pedar

evidently had no idea whether he knew Conrad or not, and left the affirmation to the other, giving him an oblivious hand.

"She will sit for me to-morrow," he insisted. "But I was asked for dinner, was n't I? You have n't had it?"

"It has just been announced;" Mrs. Brooke's voice conveyed a second reproof, but Pedar only sighed relief.

"The days are rather long when you can't afford lunch," he confided to Diantha.

Mrs. Brooke took little part in general conversation. Having brought people together, she turned them over to one another and retreated with austere composure into her own thoughts. A portrait of her son, the little boy Chesty of thirty years ago—holding a curly white dog and weak, even then, in his baby prettiness—hung on the wall opposite, but she was never seen to lift her eyes to it. A person must have been very bold to ask where her thoughts went. Pedar Sorrell might have had the courage; but he was aware only of his dinner and Diantha. As the

former in its first stages frankly absorbed him, Diantha had to turn to Conrad.

"It is nice to see you again," she said, mutely begging for the old friendliness.

He stole a quick glance at her, then looked away. "It 's ages, is n't it? And you have gone through so much;" he spoke with recovered urbanity, but as to a formal acquaintance, and silence threatened. Diantha had bewildered tears in her eyes, but no one noticed.

"You were going to tell me something," she presently reminded him.

"Oh, nothing much. You will see it in to-morrow's papers," he began hastily; then he made a wrenching effort to rise to his usual gay self. "I say 'nothing much'—just like that, but it is sheer affectation, you know. I 'm an heiress, Di. My uncle left me a lot of money. Pots of it. I can buy you anything you want."

Diantha would have been glad with him, but his tone kept her at arm's length. She could only murmur commonplaces.

"I am longing to tell you the actual sum, but I notice that heiresses never do," he ran on. "It seems to be indelicate to come down to figures. Or perhaps they hope you will think they got more than they did. We can't even act as though that part of it were interesting. No nice girl would want to know, Di. Take it from me that I 'm rich as mud." He stopped, slightly disconcerted by finding Mrs. Brooke's eyes on him.

"So the General has treated you properly," she said with her through-express directness.

"Far more than properly, poor old boy;" Conrad had a sigh of easy charity for a trying old man.

Sorrell's voice broke in. "I will paint you in very pale gray, mother-of-pearl gray, full of opal lights. I 'll find the stuff. I want to make a study of the head first. Will you come to-morrow at nine? That is n't really early. I don't see why any able-bodied person can't be up and out by nine. You need n't bring any one. I can be perfectly proper when it 's necessary."

Mrs. Brooke interposed. "She will come at ten, Pedar; and a maid will come with her."

"I wish you would send a cook; then we could have a decent lunch," said Pedar unabashed.

He absorbed Diantha after that, and she let him, secretly amused by the silent contempt in which the two men held each other. Conrad was the more aware of the feeling; Pedar disposed of him as a "society ass" and honestly forgot his presence. The terrible power produced by perfect honesty, brains and bad manners was his, and Diantha, who had at first wondered how he could ever hope for sitters, finally saw that the leading ladies of the land would eventually sit to him. They might hate him, but they would come. He compelled interest, but she was glad when the evening ended. Conrad had left early, with conventional phrases. The old affection seemed extinguished. He had not even kissed her hand.

Pedar at ten in the morning, with his work before him, was a total stranger. Diantha as a person did

not exist for him: he treated her as so much animate subject, and he swept the maid off his horizon with one oblivious gesture. His intentness reminded Diantha of a boyish Marathon runner she had once seen just before the race, and she adapted herself to it with sympathetic docility. She could always find occupation in her own thoughts, and they carried her so far that she had forgotten the lay figure on the platform when at last Pedar spoke.

"Hungry children," he said. "Beaten dogs. Helpless women married to brute males. Death by drowning. Screams of anguish. Lonely little crooked old men."

Diantha's stare ended in laughter. "Are you quite sane?" she asked.

"You are all closed up," he explained. "I want you open, as you were when I first saw you last night. I want Diantha to look out at your eyes. I 'm trying to touch you."

"It was the sufferings of poor Diantha that touched me then," she reminded him.

"Well, then—poor, lovely Diantha,—has n't got

anything but youth and beauty and health and a home and a trip to California—go on. I want that look."

The real Diantha was looking out at him, joyous with self derision, and he was painting furiously.

"Why, I 'm spoilt," she cried. "I have always yearned to be spoilt—you don't know how abominably sensible I was before the miracle; but I had almost given up. Why, I 'm as spoilt as Sy—" She stopped, but he finished it for her.

"As Sylvia. Dear me, yes. 'Nobody cares,' she wailed; and two men on the spot dead in love with her that very minute."

"They must have been the butler and the footman, then."

"Oh, come. That is n't the real Diantha—she is not afraid of the truth. Any truth. I was madly in love with you last night. As soon as this is farther along, I shall be again. Get a touch of the poison, and it goes on working in you, even when you are n't conscious of it. It will break out again some day, and then God help us all!"

Diantha had a glance for Caroline, primly sewing at a distant window.

"I think California will give me all the help I need," she said, drily, and yet with laughter underneath. Pedar painted harder than ever, though his voice remained cool and detached.

"B. M., Before the Miracle; P. M., Post Miracle. Those are your eras, evidently. I don't want to know what your miracle is, remember."

"I used to be deaf and dumb; and then suddenly I was cured."

"Well—do you like what you hear?"

"Not always," she had to admit. "Nothing has turned out—just as I had dreamed it."

"Poor lady. I will turn out exactly like your dreams, if you will give me a lead." He made the offer in all seriousness. Diantha had a laugh in her eyes for the ungainly little figure, yet pondered the suggestion. No man had ever made love to her; and she had a swift, rapturous conviction that, if she did not prevent it, Pedar would.

"If just one thing would feel as gay as it used to

look, I would be satisfied for life," she told him—a cryptic statement that left him puzzled.

"Well, I 'll try to feel as gay as I used to look," he said finally, laying down his brushes. "Now you may come down and rest while I get lunch, but don't go behind the easel."

"But I am going home to lunch. This is enough for one day, is n't it?"

Pedar flew into an irritable tirade. A more indulged girl might have found his insistence trying, but Diantha felt it sweet to be so urgently wanted. As she had no engagements, Caroline was sent out to telephone Mrs. Brooke.

"I wish she 'd get lost and never come back," said Pedar, setting out biscuits, sardines and milk without a suspicion that, as a meal, they might have been thought inadequate.

"You have n't seemed to mind her so very much," Diantha suggested. The implication surprised him, set him musing, a milk bottle suspended in one hand, his eyes on her face.

"Great Scott—what a tame life a girl must lead,"

he broke out at last. "Polite conversation—the new book, the latest play—"

"The latest play is n't always such a polite topic," she interrupted.

He admitted that with a sound of derision, and filled a glass for her. "But you speak as if you had grown up without adventures—you!"

Diantha was fitting sardines neatly between biscuits. "You are my very first," she said composedly.

He started. "Your first—?"

"Adventure. My P. M. era has only just begun, you know. I would explain, but you won't let me."

He seemed to her absurdly excited by the news. "I see, I see! You have been shut away from life—illness, anything; and now it is over and you are let out. And I am the first man to love you?"

"Yes—if you call it that."

"Good Lord!" He came to a vehement halt before her. "What else can you call it? I did n't sleep till dawn. It was 'Diantha—Diantha—' all night. And I am the first—all your life you will see men by the light you get from me! Speaking of

miracles! They will be gentlemen to you, in contrast to Pedar; or they will be muffs, by the same token; or hypocrites, because Pedar was honest; or stupid lovers, because he could sweep you off your feet. Oh, I don't dream that you will ever love me. But you won't forget me, you—"

"Mrs. Brooke says, 'Very well,' miss, and she will send the car at four," interposed the prim voice of Caroline.

Pedar swung away with a rude mutter and went back to his canvas. Diantha, serenely finishing her lunch, said to herself that life was really beginning, at last, and tried to feel it; but her mood remained flatly commonplace. All her starved girlhood she had yearned for romantic adventure, for the bold lover, the stolen kiss, even; and here it all was. Why could n't she rise to it?

"Oh, give me time," she derided herself, and went back to the platform. All the afternoon her face kept the look that made Pedar work so hotly. They parted tamely at four, the painter too absorbed for more than an absent nod.

Diantha was fitted, did a little shopping, had tea with her aunt, and went upstairs to rest and read till dinner, still in unmoved practical cheerfulness. The evening was chilly, and a fire burned on her hearth. Lights and drawn shades gave the room a pleasant air of awaiting her. In slippers and dressing gown, she sat down with a book and put her feet to the blaze; but after three tranquil minutes she sat up, startled. Out of secret depths had come a rush of elation. It rose again and again, lifting and lighting her till she stood at full height, radiant.

"I 'm loved!" she panted. "At last—at last—I 've got it! I 'm loved!" She paced the room, too exultant to be still. She wanted to sing, to shout; tears burned her eyes. "Oh, it has come!"

Not for one minute did she think of Pedar as Pedar, or of any given return. She saw only that she had come into her heritage: she was one with the women whom men loved. A pawn, struggling across the board, had attained the last row and been made a queen; and she cared only for her crown. She could look all men and women in the eyes now, unafraid,

as good as they, since she, too, had been loved. At last, reality was even better than the dream.

For sixteen hours—and very few of them were passed in sleep—Diantha moved and breathed in a new element, a heady, golden, sparkling atmosphere that gave her the step and laugh of a spring goddess. Her mood was as primitive as a savage's dance about the camp fire, and she knew it, and did not care. It was a reckless Diantha who went out to meet the next day's adventure. She crossed Pedar's threshold ready for anything that might belong to her new estate.

Was the fault with Pedar? Or did it lie in the secrets of her own nature? In the very doorway the glamour and the romance dropped, the enchanted atmosphere rolled away, and she stepped forward into brisk, bright commonplace. The day was long, full of openings for another mood, but none came. Pedar was an interesting little man and no doubt thought he was in love with her, but his flying arrows of look and speech glanced harmlessly past; and when at last, under pretense of rearranging her pose,

he laid his hand on hers, she drew back with a mild annoyance. She had not even the satisfaction of feeling outraged; she was only rather bored. And this was romantic adventure!

Pedar was scowling. "I did n't suppose you were a prude," he snapped.

"Am I?" She pondered it, wondering at the contrast between last night and to-day. Then she laughed. "It 's no use," she cried in humorous despair. "I 'm only good old Di. I can't be anything else." Her expression sent him back to his canvas, anger forgotten.

"What did you want to be?" he asked, to keep that look in her face.

"I believe I had dreams of being A Dangerous Woman; but it 's no use, Mark. I 'm—" The sound of the name she had used came back to her, checking speech and sending the color to her very hair. She tried to avert her face, but the light was merciless, and Pedar had stopped painting.

"Oho!" he said softly.

"It is nothing of the sort," she returned sharply. "You don't know what you are talking about."

He had a faint, wry smile, not unkindly. "But I am not talking at all, my dear lady."

She felt a childish impulse to angry tears. "You are thinking things that are not so," she flung at him. His silence drove her to a sharp, "I insist that you believe me."

Mindful, for once, of Caroline by the window, he came nearer, dropping his voice.

"Oh, I don't doubt your sincerity," he said with a gentleness that was unexpected. "Only, perhaps, I understand better than you do. I have felt there was some explanation; you seemed so—immune. A touch of the poison does that—even when you won't believe it 's there. I 'm sorry, sorry, sorry. But it is an honorable defeat, since I was not, after all, the first." He took her hand again and pressed it, and Diantha could have cried bewildered tears on his little shoulder, she felt so touched and so lost.

An hour of silent work ended the sitting. A knock on the door usually meant that the car had come for her, and Diantha rose at the sound, looking about the shabby studio with a warm consciousness that it had given her a friend.

"I like you, Pedar," she said.

His face lit responsively, but before he could speak the knock was repeated, and the door opened on Aunt Eleanor. Conrad was behind her.

"Conrad wants us to take tea with him, Di," Mrs. Brooke explained. "How do you do, Pedar? You know Mr. Livingston." The prod resulted in a vague greeting, despatched as quickly as possible. "How are you getting on?"

She passed the barrier of the easel without waiting for permission, then stopped short, looking at the canvas with startled intentness. Pedar indifferently turned away, but the other two felt the suspense of a coming judgment. It was solemnly delivered.

"Pedar Sorrell, you will never do anything better than that as long as you live. Finish it up as it is—

I want it. I did n't know you could go as high as this."

Pedar was unmoved: he merely nodded, as though to assure her that she was for once quite right, and moved away with an air of giving the others a chance to look if they cared to. Conrad would have neglected his opportunity, but Mrs. Brooke summoned him.

The picture showed only the unfinished head and a line of shoulder, but it was the real Diantha that looked out, visions in her eyes, wisdom and humor in the lip's deepened corner. Sylvia's beauty and Diantha's spirit shone before them, and Conrad, after a fixed look, went away. He made no apology when they found him waiting on the stairs.

Mrs. Brooke was unwontedly gracious. "Why don't you come to California with us, Conrad?" she asked as she came slowly down the long flights between the two silent young people. Diantha looked up, a happy light in her eyes. He met them for the first time that day.

"May I, Di?"

The enthusiasm of her assent left them smiling. She laughed herself.

"I really believe that at last it 's going to feel gay —as gay as it used to look," she explained.

IX

IT occurred to Diantha that the car might have been run up and down in one spot for six days, and only she would have discovered the difference. To her untraveled eyes, the country, the cities, above all, the dull little wooden villages of the West, were of absorbing interest. The longing to know what life was like among these long, limp women who came to their doors to stare at the train, these slouched men reining in their horses at the crossings, kept her for hours at the window. Her responsibilities as a guest were slight, for Aunt Eleanor, who disliked railway travel, rose from the bridge table only to eat, sleep and write letters. Mr. and Mrs. Percy Delafield had evidently been chosen for their staying powers at the game, and the same diligence had been expected of Conrad. He had sat down readily enough, and for half an hour all had gone peacefully.

Then Diantha, utterly happy in a cushioned chair by a window, heard the beginnings of trouble. Pointed questions, such as, "What were you bidding on, Conrad?" "Why did n't you give me hearts?" "Had you any reason against returning my lead?" increased in frequency. Conrad met them with charming contrition, and went on doing worse until at last Aunt Eleanor laid down her cards.

"That revoke cost us game and rubber," she announced. "I don't know where I got the idea that you played a good game, Conrad. Percy, go through the train and find us a fourth. Preferably a gentleman, but if he is a good player, we won't cavil."

Mr. Delafield discovered an acquaintance in the next car, and the game went forward on a new basis of harmony. Conrad drew a chair to Diantha's window, presenting a bland surface to her keen glance.

"When I was poor, I used to play very good bridge," he told her. "But, now that I am an heiress, I can't seem to play at all. Is n't that curious?"

"You are a fraud," she accused him.

"No, my dear. The fraud was when I used to act as if I liked to play all day. A poor young man has to be valuable, but a rich young man tactfully does as he pleases." His hands dived luxuriously into prosperous pockets. "They will invite me for my money, now, no matter what I do. Is n't that a beautiful thought?"

"Aunt Eleanor would n't. She is quite capable of shipping you home."

"Oh, I can fix that—a few pleasant little attentions. But when it comes to auction all day, I would as lief be going to the office." He settled deeper in his chair. "Think of all the poor devils in offices at this minute. My word, Di, it 's fun to be a parvenu!"

"Is n't it!" she echoed, so understandingly that he stared.

"What do you know about it?"

"Money is n't the only thing one can come into suddenly, Conrad." It was the first time that the change in Diantha had been put into words between them. Conrad had seemed afraid of the subject;

but Diantha would no longer suffer barriers. "Don't you notice a difference?" she added with cheerful effrontery. He met the challenge with the first long, direct look that he had given her since their uncomfortable meeting, a week ago, then turned away with a sigh.

"One is apt to notice that which knocks one down," he said drily. "You were always so nice, Di—I don't see why you had to be beautiful, too."

He rose irritably and walked away, leaving Diantha to discouraged thoughts. No one would rejoice with her. Aunt Eleanor had been congratulatory, but in a practical, businesslike fashion, seeing only that she had put herself in the way of advantages. Not one soul had realized what the miracle meant to her, had guessed the morning joy of waking up slim and fresh and lovely, or cared to imagine the thrilled wonder of her escape from the ugly enchantment. No one had been glad with her as she could have been glad with one who had run to her with such a joy. For a shadowed moment, Diantha confronted the ancient truth that, in a

crowded world, each goes alone. Then a small incident brought back her cheer. It was only the devout staring of a shabby woman from a station platform, the quickened, intent look that the past week had offered her at every turn. They were glad of her, the strangers. She had a gift for the world, if not for her own. In her gratitude, she smiled at the woman outside, and saw an answering light as the train went on.

"O Mark, are n't they fun—the little human moments between strangers!" The happy call sprang out before memory could snub it back. Diantha turned from it with fright. "I must n't do that," she protested.

The car took southern routes, where November did not mean winter. Wherever it went, luxuries started up to meet it. Boys arrived panting in the early morning with great jars of cream; huntsmen were mysteriously ready for them with wild game: strings of fish came up dripping from the rivers; and in his tiny cabinet the chef, who had summoned field and farm, created daily snares for idle people who knew

the value of abstinence. It was an easy, pleasant week, happiest for Diantha when cards were holding the others, and she sat at the window or on the rear platform with Conrad. He did not share her interest in the country, but he at least did not spoil it. The careless, good-humored Delafields seemed to look on quaint inhabitants of remote places as free entertainment for those who travel in private cars, and enjoyed them with untempered voices. And they threw candy to the children, causing fierce scrambles —a pastime kindly meant, yet wounding to Diantha. She did not like the spectacle of benefits tossed from above. Aunt Eleanor ran her affairs and paid no attention to any one, except for an occasional shrewd, undetected glance at the two young people. She had forgiven Conrad his failure at cards, and treated him very graciously.

"I told you how it would be," he assured Diantha as they paced a dark and wind-swept platform under the lighted windows of their train. A delay had offered her a chance for exercise and Conrad, though protesting, had followed. Once Diantha could not

have wanted anything that Conrad did not want; but these long days together were working a subtle change in their relations. Neither was as yet aware of any difference. To Diantha it was part of the general enchantment that she should move with a new freedom, express herself with a new power. Alone in her room, she could still be humbly grateful that Conrad was so "nice" to her. His conventional good looks, some trained quality in his bearing, stood to her for success in the little brilliant world where glamour lay, and whence she had retreated in failure and disgrace. She was proud of her connection with him as they set out together.

"Old ladies are very easy, Di, even the most stalwart of them," he was saying. "Put a little jump into your manners, and there you are." He acted the little jump for her with hand and shoulder, so cleverly that she laughed. Then she glanced back through the windows at the group about the card table. The Delafields lounged picturesquely, the imported fourth, who had changed his route to suit theirs, added up the score with the diligence of the

outsider who must earn his way, and Aunt Eleanor sat solidly erect, her hands folded before her, her serene gaze fixed, as though on the unblemished pages of a successful life.

"Oh, Aunt Eleanor is n't easy," she assured him, with a pitying memory of Aunt Eleanor's son. The frail youth had had a careless pleasantness that had made him dear to little girl cousins. "She acts always on her own reasons. You could jump your head off and you would n't change her."

"Something has changed her," Conrad insisted. "She quite beams on me. And you tell me it is n't my money; so it must be my manners. Ah, they are all easy at heart, Di."

"Are young ladies easy, too?" she asked idly, then was sorry for the question. He met it with a smile.

"I have n't found it so, have I? But I am told that they are—far too easy to make the pursuit amusing."

Diantha objected to that. "I hate this hunter attitude! Why should n't love go out to meet love, perfectly simply and gladly?"

"Because neither the simple nor the glad is effective in modern society. Besides, one likes a tussle."

"Yes;" Diantha strode with the energy of impatience; "and when you have at last 'won' a girl, you don't realize it, but you have merely made her forget that she did n't quite like you and that you were n't what she wanted. I should find it more flattering to be approved from the beginning, myself."

Conrad refused to excite himself over the abstract. "Well, there is a gentleman on this platform who evidently approves you from the beginning," he said lazily. "He is approving you so pointedly that I think I should take you in." He had to lower his voice, for a man of flashy, vulgar middle age was again in their path, staring deliberately over a mammoth cigar.

"I know. I wish he would go away." Diantha shivered with repugnance. "It is my own fault, too. He interested me as a type, so I looked at him. I am only just learning that."

"Learning what?"

"That if you want to stare comfortably at types, you must be plain. Otherwise, the types misunderstand. A girl with—good looks—can't risk meeting any man's eyes. In New York, at least."

"Oh, come, you know you like it. You owned you did."

"From nice people, yes. But not from beasts."

The distinction amused him. "Thus is niceness rewarded! Do you really know how stunning you are, Di?"

"O Conrad, I do! I 'm shamefully aware of it." She turned impulsively to him. "And the good clothes, and the car, and you—it is all past belief!"

"And me? Do I really count among those good things?"

"Oh, yes, you count." The dry admission made him laugh.

"Did any one ever count tremendously with you, Di? Have you ever been in love?"

They stood at the platform's edge, the fresh wind sweeping blackly about them, the black crests of

mountains towering far overhead. Diantha lifted her face to the remote stars.

"Yes," she said.

"Poor dear! And nothing came of it?"

She looked tranquilly into his face. "I was fat and dingy, you see; I was only good old Di. So nothing came of it."

"The more fool he," said Conrad emphatically, striking a match in the shelter of his two hands. But the cigarette was not lighted. The match blazed, but Conrad stood as though caught by some overwhelming thought, motionless until the flame scorched his fingers. He put it out and turned slowly, almost fearfully, to look at his companion. She leaned against a rail, her face again lifted to the stars, the light cloud of her hair blown about her clear eyes.

"Di!" he said, and his voice startled her. "Who was the man?" His eyes asked another question, but Diantha met both with baffling serenity, lit by a wise little smile.

"I don't intend to tell you."

Conrad's fixed gaze might have been traveling back over the years of her selfless friendship, her unsleeping readiness to aid or comfort, the brimming warmth of her welcome, the affection that had glowed like a well trimmed lamp, never flaring or waning; but she waited without fear. If the truth came to him, his conventional training would incline him to shut the door on it. And if it persisted—curiously enough, the secrecy she would have died to preserve no longer seemed so vitally important. They both knew that his heart was unalterably Sylvia's; it did not really matter if he guessed where her heart had spent its youth.

They had paced the length of the platform before he spoke. "You mean—a girl's fancy, Di?"

"No; a grown love. But it was clearly hopeless, and one does n't die of hopeless things—not if one has any sense." Her note of amusement proved her in no mortal danger. "Did you hear 'All aboard'?"

The call was repeated, imperatively, and as their car lay at the end of the train, they were obliged to

get on where they were and walk back. People were standing in the aisles, and as Conrad went ahead to make a way for her, she had a poignant recollection of herself following Mark Wendell between the lunch tables of an inn, her heart heavy with apology that she could not outwardly do him credit.

"Try it now, Mark," she defied him. She had flung Mark Wendell out of her life, but it was astonishing how many things she found to fling after him.

A stir and murmur followed her course through the train, and Diantha, hearing, reveled in it; yet she could have shouted aloud at the mighty joke. It was this hidden, persistent amusement that saved her from the curse of self-consciousness. Her spirit marched as though it carried a gay banner, and knew that it was the banner at which the crowd stared.

A slight confusion at the door of the last Pullman separated her from Conrad. A belated passenger was being hauled on board while his anxious family hovered over the operation. Diantha fell back a step into the narrow passage, laying a hand on the wall to steady herself. She had not been conscious

of any one behind her, yet instantly, quietly, a hand closed over hers.

Diantha's hand was snatched away as swiftly as angry brain could signal to ready muscles, and yet it seemed to lie for an eternity under that abominable touch. She wheeled about, blazing, to find her admirer of the platform smiling on her wrath. His look was as unbearable to her as his touch. She had not been schooled to deal with such encounters, and the surge of resentment would have cast some missile of speech in his face if Conrad had not spoken on the other side.

"I lost you, Di," he said, and his voice, well bred, protective, touched with some new tenderness, took her back into his safe, clean world. She followed him in silence; but a glance into her face made him pause at their door.

"Was that fellow bothering you?" The ready indignation soothed and comforted her.

"Oh, never mind him," she said, secretly rubbing her hand in a fold of her cloak. She could not speak

of the loathsome moment. Not until she had scrubbed hands and face was she rid of it. Then she looked long and gravely into the glass.

"And I thought it would all be fun!" she said.

X

IT was an exotic, picturesque society into which the car led them at the journey's end, a spending, speeding, cosmopolitan little world in a semi-tropic setting. Early rains had covered the land with freshness, and the wild flowers sprang up for winter as readily as for spring. Gardens flung their glowing tapestries about every dwelling, high or low, and everywhere, at the turn of the road, beneath the broad window and below the wall, at the end of every excursion, lay the serene blue of the Pacific. Mrs. Brooke had many friends, and they greeted her as a happy excuse for a rush of festivities. And into this new life Diantha stepped off with the rest.

Her aunt came to her room as she was dressing for the first plunge, and looked her over with businesslike approval. It would have been hard not to approve of Diantha that night. Against the

satiny whiteness of her gown various colored jewels and flaring velvet roses had been tried, then discarded for the clear splendor of diamonds, so that her only color lay in the tiny splash of crimson on either cheek. Her eyes were grave, almost solemn; her head with its piled gray cloud of hair was as stilly erect as though the diamond circlet it carried were a crown.

"You will do very well," Aunt Eleanor repeated. "You have n't had much social experience, Di, but it is in your blood. It will come easily. So long as you don't get excited—"

"My dear Aunt," Diantha protested, "I am so excited already that my teeth are chattering."

Mrs. Brooke relaxed to a smile. "Well, if it gives you that air and color, I don't mind." She turned back to her own quarters. "I am not afraid for you," she added reassuringly.

Diantha, too nervous to wait alone in a featureless hotel room, took up her gloves and wrap and went on to their sitting-room. The place was dimly lighted, and she thought at first it was empty. She had

lifted a bare arm to the lights before she saw Conrad, staring at her with a look so strained and startled that her heart went out to him in compassion and apology. She came impulsively to him before he could rise.

"I 'm sorry, Conrad! I wish I did n't look so like her. I can't help it—but it kills me to hurt you." She had put out her hand and, still lying back in his chair, he took it between both his.

"You don't hurt me. You make me very happy," he said gently.

"Truly?"

"Truly, my dear. What was that you said?—'One does n't die of hopeless things.' I 'm all right, Di." He smiled, but her eyes grew misty.

"Ah, I wish you could have it," she murmured, turning away. Under the windows, beyond the lawns and a white strip of beach, lay the ocean, darkly heaving under a pale moon. Diantha stared out at it, sad for all the sadness of the world, till she found Conrad standing beside her.

"Di, you are such a—" he broke off, and she wait-

ing smiling for the old phrase; she did not mind being "a good sort" to-night. "Such a lovely thing," he finished lightly. "What a Cinderella couple we are, you with your beauty, I with my immodest competence. Diantha, how do you intend to use your great gift?"

The touch of mockery dispelled her cloud. "To be happy with," she declared. "What shall you do with yours?"

A confiding smile lit his pleasant face, as he settled against the casement. Conrad never stood long unsupported. "There are several old proverbs that I have always wanted to explore," he began. "Not provinces—proverbs. 'Satan and mischief,' you know; and 'a fool and his money.' And 'Contentment is better than riches.' Oh, dozens of them. I intend to become an authority on proverbs in the next few years."

"And then go back to the office?"

He laughed. "Don't be prosaic and sensible. It is so wildly romantic, you and I and this place. We ought to go quite mad."

Diantha looked down at her gleaming self. "Ah, Conrad, I have," she said softly. "Quite, quite mad. Life does n't do things like this. I am a poor lunatic shut in a madhouse, dreaming she is Queen Louise of Prussia on the stairs."

His glance had followed hers. "I am glad I was put into the same ward," he said with a stifled sigh. "I suppose my delusion is that I have come into money. Good Lord, Diantha, I hope they don't cure us!"

"Where is the joke?" asked Percy Delafield from the doorway. Aunt Eleanor's summons spared them an answer. When Aunt Eleanor said it was time to start, one started.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," Diantha scolded her thudding heart as the motor darted past spreading palms and pepper trees blackly drooping, and beds of blossoming flowers, pale in the moonlight. Yet there was more eagerness than fear in the thudding. She knew what was before her that night—not because of beauty, not because she came with prestige to a gaily cordial community, but be-

cause under all these advantages she felt in her hand the mysterious gift of power. "I can do it," was her secret cry, as the doors fell back for her and she stepped into the light. "O Mark, I can do it!"

Seen from the outside, it was only a pretty girl's success; but to Diantha each hour of the night seemed a step by which she mounted higher into freedom and power and glory. She remembered, desperately, that one must not be excited, and so kept what Aunt Eleanor called her "air" even when at last she stood on the top step, in the center of life, with the light streaming about her, and a sense of myriad joyous hands held up to her from below. It was good to go, then; to take the vision with her into the cool dark. She became again aware of her own party, which carried a startled air of being ranged around her. Conrad had never been far away, but she had lost consciousness of him except as a friendly presence hovering near in case she needed help. Feeling their eyes on her, she smiled vaguely.

"Well, Di!" said Aunt Eleanor, and the prevailing sentiment seemed to be expressed. All added

to it except Conrad, who leaned back in the shadow and was pronounced by the others to be asleep. An automatic self answered suitably for Diantha on the way home, but her spirit strained forward to the coming solitude. There something awaited her; but she would not glance towards it until this surface business of human intercourse was over.

At last, her door closed, she stood once more on the top step with the light streaming about her; and she knew now for what she had mounted. She was alive in every cell, she had a dozen senses instead of five, and there were no secrets from her. She turned strongly, joyously, to the north.

"You will see me, too, Mark! You will see me as soon as you see her." The silent message leaped out to find him. "And you will love me. I am the one—I am for you. Sylvia has had everything; it is my turn. And she only charmed you. That was n't love, dearest. You have asked me, and when you see me—" her arms stretched out— "Oh, come safe, come safe, come soon!"

The revelation did not frighten her. She felt

now as if she had known all along how it was with her. Hiding from the knowledge had been only a game. Of course she loved him, her young war lord, with his straight speech and the keen eyes that nothing escaped, his Spartan code and his warm, lonely young heart, setting out across the Arctic waste! She did not belittle the years that she had given to Conrad. But that desire had died long ago for lack of hope, leaving echoes and memories that had stood to her for the real presence, until love itself had come to take possession.

And she was glad, now, for that first loss. Conrad lived in a small world, and had no interests outside it. He was Conrad, and dear beyond the possibility of change, but she felt in her the power to lead a bigger life than his would ever be.

"Mark, Mark!" She paced swiftly up and down, feeling magically strong and light and clear. "I can wait at the foot of the mountain—you know that. I don't mind hardship, and I 'm wild to see and to know. I am the right one—just have faith, beloved, till you see me. I won't hamper you. I

don't want a merely social life. I have had my triumph, and it was good, good—we will do that now and then. But the glamour is n't there any more, dearest. I knew that hours ago! The glamour is where love is—where you are. Mark, do you hear me? It 's Di!" She stood still, listening for an answer; then laughed at herself, exultantly, and went to bed. "I have to be foolish, I am so glad," she confided to him.

They were to reach home a week before Christmas, and Mark Wendell might be expected at any time after that: during the crowded days that followed, Diantha's attention never strayed far from this knowledge. Her secret shone in her eyes and laughed in her voice; it put a light barrier of mystery about her, increasing her charm for those who felt but did not recognize her indifference; and it blinded her to things going on openly about her. She accepted all the gaiety very happily. Conrad's unfailing presence at her elbow was but an instance of the lavish splendor of her new life.

"What are you thinking about, Di?" Conrad's

voice was impatient. Diantha, who had been chanting to herself, "Three days from now we start!" turned to him with a guilty smile. He had run off with her to the beach, pleading that it was his turn for a little attention, but he had received only the outer semblance of what he sought. Seated in the warm sand under the cliffs she had fallen into happy reverie. "Your triumphs, I suppose," he went on, not too amiably. "I wish I had come into beauty instead of wealth. It seems to be more fun."

She turned thoughtful eyes on him, hesitating. "Do you know," she brought it out at last, "I sometimes believe I could have done very nearly as well without the—well, the beauty? It sounds absurd, but I can't help feeling that it is the good old Di underneath that really does it. I needed the spirit and the health to try, and something to open the door. Beauty does that, of course. I wonder—" She fell into silent musing. Presently she took it up at another point. "I used to dream of a miracle that would give me back—make me like Sylvia again: I played it by the hour. I thought it would feel like

music all day long—great solemn marches and gay dances and love songs. And it has—when I was quite alone. Oh, I've sung and danced! But never, never when I expected anything from any one else. That is the queer part of it. The welcome was what I had dreamed of most, welcome everywhere; but it was only strangers who really—! And as for gaiety, good old Di had almost as much. And yet I would n't go back, you know; that would kill me. There is so much to understand!" Conrad had little interest in discoveries, and offered no suggestion. She came back to him with a laugh. "I 'm glad of it, whatever it does. Oh, everything is so nice, Conrad!"

He jerked a clam shell into the tide. "Is it?" His tone brought her eyes to his face.

"Are n't you happy?" she asked with concern.

"No;" and another shell skimmed the foam.

"Ah, my dear! You have begun on your proverbs already. Which one is it—'Contentment and Riches'?"

"I suspect it is, 'Better a dinner of herbs where

love is.' " He searched her face, as though to drag out a secret. Finding no answer there, his bitter complaint would not be kept back. "You have changed so," he burst out. "You are going away from me—just because a lot of silly fools make a fuss over you. It is not fair. I won't lose you like that!"

He had her full attention at last. "Conrad!" she protested in frightened warning.

"You did love me once," he persisted. "You meant me, that night—you know it. And now, when I love you, you 're changing. I won't bear it. I love you, Di. I want you. I won't let them get you away!"

"Oh, no!" She shrank as if a crime were threatened. "Oh,—don't, don't ever again! Oh, please don't mean that!"

Her distress calmed him. He laid a protecting hand over hers in the sand. "Why not, dear?"

She caught away her hand. "I won't believe it. Just six little months ago, you were heart-broken for Sylvia. Is that all that love amounts to? I don't

mean that you ought to be desolate all your life; but a few months—O Conrad, don't kill my faith in love! I'd rather lose anything on earth than that."

He prodded at the sand, outwardly unmoved. "I can't help it," he said doggedly. "What is past is past. I love you. How could you help seeing it?"

She turned on him with anger. "How could I believe my eyes if I had?" Tears blinded her. She dropped her face into her palms, casting about for some mitigating fact. "Oh, and I can't say that you were a light lover, I can't say that your kind of love would n't count! That is what hurts so horribly. Are all men like this?"

"I don't know—I don't care. I love you."

She drew breath for an impulsive answer, but paused before some arresting thought. It held her motionless for a long time, while the sun sank to the western horizon, and Conrad lay silent beside her, his hat over his eyes. With the going of the sun, the splendors of color faded from the cliffs, and a breath

of winter came up out of the sea. She turned to him, once more his warm old friend.

"I understand, Conrad, even if you don't just now," she said gently. "It 's not Di that you love: it is the Sylvia in me. You have seen her in me from the first moment—you could hardly bear it, then; and now your love is trying to get her here, through me. That 's all it is, dear. When you see her again, you will know that I was right." She stood up, shaking the sand out of her gown. "You are truer than you know, Conrad."

He made no answer, and they walked in dreary silence to the hotel door, where he left her. She did not see him again that evening.

It was a miserable night for Diantha. Explain as she might, the foundations of the world were shaken. Her own love for Conrad had been an unimportant, inept thing, a blunder, to be snubbed out of sight as much as possible, but Conrad's love for Sylvia had been a great, romantic fact in history, like the Spanish Armada or the Discovery of America. That he could even believe himself un-

true to it—and so soon—seemed to falsify all her traditions, to turn the god of her temple into a grinning wooden image. It was a very youthful pain, but a very real one, that harassed her night, and finally drove her out into the early sunlight.

The beach lay shining and empty, crisp under her feet from the last high tide. The clay walls of the cliffs had been eaten into by irregular seas, so that she passed from one great chamber to another, pleasantly cut off from the world, seeing only the serene Pacific and, far out, little gleaming islands lifted into a charmed unreality by the mirage. Any abstract trouble must have found comfort in that lovely morning world. Diantha began to accept and assimilate her new knowledge, and was even harboring a cheerful thought of breakfast when a turn of the cliffs ended her solitude.

Tramps were common enough in that easy climate, comfortable, evil-looking loafers who lived well at lavish rear doors, but this waif, apparently asleep under a battered hat, might have been cast up by some sea of desolation. Emaciated, unshorn, with

broken boots and a frayed elbow, he lay so still that Diantha for a chilled moment thought him dead, and paused, wavering between repulsion and her duty to her neighbor. Then a faint gleam under the hat told her that she, too, was being stared at. She shrank back, and in her fright made the mistake of going on, instead of turning back. That she should have so feared that gaunt scarecrow was clearly absurd, for one thrust of her vigorous young arm must have felled him; yet Diantha crossed the sand with a dignity that trembled, and, once round the next angle of cliff, she frankly ran.

A dire thought stopped her. Sooner or later she must go back, and the only way she knew was by the beach. The terrors of her childhood concerning dark closets, or a bear under the bed, were not more acute than her dread of passing the limp, sinister form. She halted, and was miserably studying the cliffs for a path up when round the point she had cleared came a slow, limping figure. The man was following her.

Diantha, pretending not to see him, went swiftly

on past the next point. A call followed her, but she would not hear. A long, bare strip of beach lay before her now; the next point was hopelessly distant and, if there were paths up the cliffs, she was too frightened to find them. She strode on, trying not to look back, but stealing glances till again, toiling round the point, her scarecrow pursuer came in view.

A sudden anger rushed to Diantha's aid, a flash of the outraged wrath that had whirled her on her admirer of the train. It cut the bonds of old, traditional fear, setting her free. A new force steadied her nerves and strung her right arm with a primitive impulse to strike.

"I am going home now," she said and, turning, she walked steadily back. The man sank on a boulder where the beach was a mere strip, clearly waiting for her, but Diantha in her sudden power felt capable of walking through and over him, if necessary. She was nearly abreast of him when he spoke.

"It 's Sylvia, is n't it?" The feeble, anxious voice came with difficulty. "The papers said Di-

antha, but as I remember you both—it is Sylvia, is n't it?"

A new kind of fright had laid its paralyzing hold on Diantha. She could only stare, silently crying out against belief. In the unshaven face, wasted by dissipation and illness, familiar lines began to come out with remorseless certainty. Meeting the pale blue eyes, harassed now, and conscious only of self, she knew him.

"Chesty!"

Her appalled voice seemed to remind him of his appearance. He glanced down at himself with a dim surprise.

"I have slept out for three nights—I suppose I look pretty wild," he said, but it was clear that he had passed caring for appearances. "I read that the old lady was here, so I got up and tramped over. I 'd like to die in a decent bed. Do you think she will—take me in?" His eyes were swimming with physical weakness, and a fear that he might die then and there drove out all other thoughts.

"Can you come nearer the hotel, where a carriage

can reach you?" she asked, and put an encouraging hand under his arm. He rose and toiled patiently beside her, stopping at intervals for a crashing cough, but making no complaint. When he spoke, it was of the present—of the lifts he had had on the way, of the state of his boots, of the dogs that had bothered him. He was no humbled prodigal, no restored son: only an empty husk with an imperative instinct to die as he had been born, in a good bed.

In sight of the hotel, Diantha left him and went on alone, her heart heavy for her mission. Conrad, seeing her from the veranda, came to meet her, as though determined that there should be no self consciousness between them; but she had forgotten last night. She told him what had happened, and sent him for a doctor and a carriage while she hurried to her aunt. Mrs. Brooke sat by a breakfast tray, an air of solid success in the very movements of her fingers and carriage of her head. Diantha had not heard her allude to her son for years, and laid hands on the hidden wound with sick reluctance.

"Aunt Eleanor, I have been down on the beach,

and I found a man there, very broken and ill," she began. At the words, or the shaken voice, the paper fell from her aunt's hand. Evidently, for all her complacency, she lived in readiness for such news. "He had come a long way, to ask if you would take him in." Diantha turned away, that she might not see the veil lifted. "It was Chesty, dear Aunt Eleanor."

The silence lasted a bare thirty seconds. Then Aunt Eleanor rose, her usual self but for an appalling whiteness.

"Where is he?" she asked and, hearing what Diantha had done, commended her. Even in this moment, Aunt Eleanor spoke as from the all-wise to the humanly imperfect.

They went down together, to find Conrad and a young doctor waiting by a carriage. Perhaps Aunt Eleanor's immobility would not have survived the meeting so well, if they had not found her son nearly unconscious. When stimulants had roused him, he looked at his mother with a dull content, but neither spoke. The doctor advised a sanitarium high on a

hill over the town, and drove off with them, leaving the other two standing in the sand.

"Ah, Conrad, Chesty could tell you something about proverbs," Diantha sighed, confronting a world suddenly turned gray.

The car had to go back to New York at the appointed time, but Diantha's song—"Two days from now!"—was over. The others went with it, by Mrs. Brooke's request, but her niece's offer to stay was accepted.

"I wish you would. You will be a help to me," was the immediate answer, crushing a contraband hope that her sacrifice would be refused. She saw the others start with secret despair.

"He will see Sylvia first!" She could think of nothing else. "He is mine, rightfully mine, but he won't know, and he won't have faith, and she will be there first. O Mark, Mark, wait for me! Beloved, have faith! Wait!"

XI

CHESTY, shaven and clean in his white bed, lay between life and death and cared about neither. On his better days he noted the luxuries about him, took an interest in his food, or complained of his nurse; but there was no realization of the past, no summing up of his life's worth. He was dying as he had lived, in the moment. Had he shown a touch of nobility, the waiting would not have seemed so cruel to Diantha. She went in to him touched and grieved, ashamed of her secret passion of impatience; but she always came out tense with revolt.

"He is not worth it! He is not worth my life's happiness." The inner cry persisted until at last, on Christmas Day, she thought that she could bear it no longer. They were staying at the sanitarium, and she waited until her aunt, leaving the sick room,

went down into the garden for a brief rest. Diantha gave herself no time to hesitate. The truth was not easy to tell, and might not be understood; but she must tell it all.

The garden was gay with scarlet and blue and gold, heady with the fragrance of heliotrope and orange blossoms: an incongruous setting for the stern, sad, erect figure seated under a pretty flutter of maidenhair vine. Diantha's purpose faltered as she drew near. She was determined to go through with it, but, seated beside her aunt, she could not find words.

Aunt Eleanor broke the silence. "You are not having a very merry Christmas, my dear."

The thought for her touched Diantha unbearably. "Ah, but what you are going through! If I could only help—" It was not what she had come to say, and she broke off in dismay. Mrs. Brooke laid her hand on the girl's knee.

"I am not usually a person who needs support," she said, looking steadily into the misty distance; "but I find your presence a help and a comfort,

Diantha. I appreciate your staying. It is not easy for a girl to face such things." Diantha's head had drooped and she said nothing. Presently her aunt went on: "I do not think that Sylvia would have stayed. I mean, she would have found some imperative reason why she must go back. Perhaps many girls would. But I believe one could always count on you to do more than is asked of you. I wanted you to know that I am not—oblivious." She felt the quivering young hand close on hers, and answered its pressure without turning her face. "Yes. The failure of your child is the only sorrow that never ends," she said, rising, and walked slowly away.

Of course, the revolt was over. Diantha could only be fiercely thankful that she had not obtruded her selfish story, her trivial wail about a lover, on this solemn grief. She took up again the burden of patience.

"It will be as it will be," she said to the joyous garden. "I leave it to fate. Wait for me, Mark, or do as you must." Then she went into the house to write a Christmas letter to her mother. "I still

seem to be good old Di: I shall never get away from that," she admitted with a dim smile.

Another week dragged past. Diantha opened her mother's letters with dire apprehension, but still not one of them mentioned the return of her neighbor's son. She tried not to let in hope, but thoughts that shocked and shamed her whispered at her ears till she put her two hands over them and cried out against the torment.

"There certainly is a personal devil," she declared at last. "I, Diantha, could never wish to push a poor soul off the earth before his hour came. It is n't Di who keeps saying, 'If Chesty would only go!' It 's the devil." She faced her persecutor with a defiant nod. "You can't make me agree with you," she informed him, "so you might just as well stop your whispering." And, to prove her sincerity, she went to the room where the poor soul lay, to see if she could help or comfort.

A screen across the doorway hid her entrance and, seeing that Chesty was alone with his mother, she hesitated, instinctively reluctant to interrupt any

such moment. Chesty was protesting feebly against his broth and Mrs. Brooke, holding the cup, was urging him. His hand, peevishly motioning it away, struck the spoon, sending its contents on his mother's dress. For an instant, he looked as frightened as the little boy Chesty must have looked when his naughtiness came up for judgment.

"I 'm so sorry," he stammered. "I truly did n't mean it, Mother—"

She had put down the cup and wiped away the stain. "Of course you did n't, dear. It was only an accident," she said. The relief of being so gently met lifted her son, for once, out of the present. He put up his thin hand to take hers.

"You 're so good to me," he murmured. "I 've been a bad lot, Mother—and you 're so good!"

Diantha was stealing away unnoticed, but she heard his mother's broken answer: "Ah, my little boy, perhaps I was n't good enough—"

She had to hide her tears in her own room. "Oh, Devil, and you wanted him to go before that!" She flung out her accusation, as she might have flung a

dead sin out of her living soul. "I shall never hear you again. Your day is over!"

Another day was over with that night. Hurrying feet and a summons at the next room roused her before dawn. Chesty had fulfilled his dream of dying in a good bed.

Mrs. Brooke returned home with her solid composure apparently unshaken; but Diantha knew her secret, and loved her for that moment of self doubt. She would not leave until her aunt was settled in her comfortable house with her secretary and her telephone and the multitudinous affairs of her competent life. Then, righteously released, Diantha turned her back on sad things and flew home.

She knew before she reached her own gate that Mark had not yet come. Perhaps it was a glimpse of little Border, sitting forlornly and without expectation on his front lawn, that told her so surely; but it seemed to her that the whole quiet, empty-looking house said, "Not here." And her first sight of Sylvia said the same thing. Sylvia looked well, and very lovely, and exhibited herself with imper-

sonal pride as a result of a ruinously expensive system of building up to which she had given the past weeks; but Diantha saw something more than renewed health. Sylvia was alight with hope and happiness and love, and she, too, was singing the ancient song of woman, "He is coming!"

Diantha had not counted on this. It had been comparatively easy to put aside the thought of a cold, resentful Sylvia; but Sylvia gay, newly responsive, confident of her coming joy, was quite another matter. Diantha's spirits fell so appallingly that her kind little mother declared her tired out and tucked her up in bed. After dinner she appeared with a volume of Jane Austen, the unfailing family refuge in time of bodily trouble.

"I hope you are not in for an attack, dear," she worried, forgetting that the old enemy was slain.

"I don't have attacks now," Diantha reminded her, and sighed a little. An attack seemed just then a fairly simple matter.

Sylvia had followed her mother, taking the stairs at a run.

"I 'll do my breathing exercises while Mother reads," she announced. "I ought to have an open window, but never mind." She laid herself down on the roomy old couch and did strange things with her arms and chest until the reader, stealing glances, choked with laughter.

"My dear girl, I can't read if you look so absurd," she protested, shaken and shining with enjoyment.

"Perhaps you would prefer the knee exercises," said Sylvia, and proceeded to march round the room in a sitting posture, keeping an air of dignity and reserve that broke down even Diantha's gravity. Her laughter had tears in it, however, and Sylvia was adoringly commanded to behave or go away.

"Di is too tired for such nonsense," Mrs. Brooke insisted, wiping her eyes. Sylvia returned to her couch.

"I 'll relax, then," she said. "That ought to be a restful sight." But, after a limp moment, her muscles forgot to rest. She looked ready for strong flight as she lay with her hands clasped behind her

head, smiling before her. Mrs. Brooke read scenes that Diantha could have said by heart, chapters that seemed a part of the big, old room and of all the rich past. The sense of home, of family warmth and nearness, was so dear, and yet so wounding, that at last she had to hide behind closed lids and let them steal away.

What little sleep Diantha found that night came after dawn, and she awakened late, to find Sylvia hovering in the doorway.

"I had to look in," she apologized. "Mother was beginning to think you had passed away in your sleep. I will bring you some breakfast, if you like."

"Oh, I will get up," Diantha protested; but before she had finished dressing, her twin was back with a tray.

"I really don't mind waiting on people in itself," Sylvia explained. "I am only afraid of getting them to expect it. I would help you unpack if it were n't for establishing a precedent."

An unwritten family law gave to Sylvia's moods the right of way over the moods of others. Diantha

responded in the same key. "Oh, risk it, just this once. I will do my best to forget it."

Sylvia decided to take the risk. "What I really want is to see your new clothes," she added. "If Aunt Eleanor has done you better than she does me—O Di, I know you have established frightful precedents with her. And I had her so carefully trained not to expect too much. I ought not to have let you go."

She tumbled out her sister's possessions, and Diantha accepted the confusion with a full heart, unbearably moved by the other's happiness. It seemed a long time before Sylvia, having done her worst, withdrew to her own affairs, leaving Diantha the relief of silence and work.

"She is n't really warmer to me: she is simply flowing over on any one who is handy," she declared, by way of stiffening her drooping spirit.

The house next door was open, but there was a new first baby in the house of the married daughter, so the family was away most of the time. Diantha had been home for several days when Mrs. Brooke,

seeing Mrs. Wendell return, went over for news of the grandchild. She came back with a troubled face.

"The baby is splendid, but they are desperately worried about the son," she explained. The book fell from Sylvia's hand, and Diantha's work was laid down, but the mother saw in their faces only the proper response to bad news. "It seems, the last word they had from him, he thought he could be home by the fifteenth of December. That is over a month past now, and there has n't been a word. I really do not consider that an only son has a right to take such dangerous trips."

Sylvia picked up her book. "What do they think can have happened?" she asked, smoothing a creased leaf.

"Oh, my dear, with rivers, and ice, and getting lost, and no food, and wild animals, what could n't happen?" Mrs. Brooke rose, letting Diantha take her cloak. "Thank you, Di: don't go upstairs on purpose. Dear me, I can't help being glad that you are both at home." She drew a chair to the fire

and spread out the evening paper. "She says it is the dearest baby," she added with returning cheerfulness.

Sylvia had shown her happiness, but her anxiety she kept strictly to herself. Diantha, watching her still composure during the interminable days that followed, wondered drearily if in all families the members hid so from one another. She longed to go to Sylvia, to cry out, "I love him, too! I suffer everything that you suffer." But Sylvia's door was shut, and she could not open it. "If he is only safe!" All her thoughts came back to that. "Nothing else matters. I can bear anything but a world without him."

One night it stormed and Diantha, creeping down to the long drawing-room, paced there for hours, living the battle of frail human strength against wild winds and icy torrents. In the morning she looked so worn that her mother spoke of it. Sylvia gave her a languid glance, but it held no surmise. Her composure suddenly made Diantha wonder how great her terror was.

"Perhaps she does n't love him as I do," she thought with a mighty relief. But, an hour later, that hope was ended. She and her mother were sorting linen when Sylvia came flying up the stairs.

"Mother—Di—" her voice rang with good news. "He 's safe—they have heard!"

"Who, dear? Oh, Mark Wendell, of course. Well, I am glad for his mother." Mrs. Brooke sat down to hear about it. "Who told you?"

Sylvia had herself in hand again. "Of course it is Mark Wendell," she said gaily. "I happened to see a telegraph boy going in there so, after a polite interval, I ran over. He is all right, and he will be home in ten days." She put her arm about her mother's shoulders. "Let me do this," she said.

"We have just finished, darling. Don't bother." Mrs. Brooke was touched and grateful. "Di, what are you doing? Don't you know linen from cotton, child?"

Diantha apologized, and corrected her error with averted face. Sylvia ran off, and presently they heard her singing.

"Di, I don't see how you can call that dear girl spoiled," Mrs. Brooke remonstrated. Diantha sighed, but said nothing.

Sylvia's joy seemed to flood the house all the morning. Her voice and her light feet carried it upstairs and down on a score of unnecessary trips. A new kindness shone out of her. She ran errands, and helped in household tasks with a splendid, scattering inefficiency. Early in the afternoon, she came to Diantha with a topaz chain in her hands.

"You would look stunning in this," she said. "I want you to have it. I have so many."

The gift seemed to scorch Diantha's fingers, but Sylvia did not notice her constraint. "There is a pin that goes splendidly with it. You ought to have that, too," she said, and went to find it. Diantha flung on coat and furs, driven by a choking need to get out of the house.

It was a gray, raw day, and the clashing of bare twigs reminded Diantha of the February woods that had been her refuge years ago, when she ran home

to renounce life and love. Was the same renunciation to be asked of her again?

"No!" she cried angrily, and strode away from the thought; but it followed close at her heels. "Sylvia is so happy," it pleaded. "She is so sweet and dear and alive—and so good. Love is what she needed. You can't hurt Sylvy, Di!"

Logic, common sense, the rights of the individual, the best good of the majority—Diantha used all her righteous weapons against the foolish softness of her heart; and still it cried, "You can't spoil Sylvia's happiness." At last, on a lonely hill top, she stopped fighting, lifting her face to the gray north.

"I can be unhappy better than she can," she said. "I will stand back—I will go away. What will be, will be, Mark. Dear love, I can't help you now. I would die for you; but I can't hurt Sylvy."

The way home seemed long, for she was suddenly very tired, but she brought with her a sorrowful peace. She thought it was an old woman who plodded up the steps of her old home; but it was a girl, breathless and trembling, who started back from

the letter on the hall table. It stood propped up to face her, a battered, soiled, torn envelope, evidently at the end of its endurance, and across its face ran the clear, square writing that meant Mark Wendell.

"'What a nice girl you are, Diantha!'" She saw him, bodily, and put out her hands to the letter as she might have put them out to him. Then she ran to her room with it.

Within was another envelope, also sealed, and inscribed, "If not delivered to Diantha Brooke, destroy unopened." Diantha read in wonder, then slowly broke it open and took out a long letter.

Diantha: Seven weeks ago I had my last mail, before cutting loose from civilization. There were two letters that counted. One was from my mother, and it gave me an item of neighborhood news: "You will be sorry to hear that that nice girl next door was taken violently ill yesterday. They operated at once, but she is very low, and there is little hope. I mean Diantha, the friendly one." The other letter was from you, a wavering line or two. "I am not very well," it said.

O Diantha, if you are still there, how can I tell you! I did n't know, at first. I set out as I had planned, carrying these two letters; but every day they seemed to

grow heavier, till now they are weighing me down into the earth. Violently ill, facing death—"I am not very well," you wrote. Is there anyone on earth like you! I love you so. I love you every hour and every minute. I will not believe the unbearable thing.

Di dear, first of all, will you forgive me for that abominable letter? My only excuse is that I did n't understand myself. I have forgotten the words, thank heaven, but I know I suggested marriage as an excellent arrangement for both of us. Blatant young fool. I can see how you read it, with your little one-sided smile, and how you understood and forgave—and you did n't throw me out of the window, as I deserved. That poor, shaken, racked scrawl did n't say no. That is what gives me hope now. Love me, Di. Please love me. You *must*. No man living is good enough for you, but I can try to be. I remember everything you ever said to me—it 's as if you had knocked out doors and windows in a boarded up house. So wise, so wonderful, yet so simply a girl. *Not very well*—that breaks my heart. No—breaks it open.

We are nearly at the end of our journey. To-day we came across some Indians who have been hunting musk ox, and they will take out letters for me. A wind full of snow is hooting about the lodge, but there is a good fire of moss and willow stems, and I have made a lamp out of a condensed milk can and caribou grease, with a strip of shirt for the wick. It is n't luxurious, yet I can see you here, Di, alive to all that is wild and beautiful,

and not much concerned about the stones under your blankets. (I 'd dig them out for you, dearest.) While any other girl—

Di, I want to tell you something, frankly, just as it happened. One can tell you things. At first, I was very much attracted by your sister. You thought I did n't like her, because I scolded about beauties, but that was sheer panic. I was afraid I liked her too well. Then you were ill, you remember, and I saw her every day. My love, it was the old experience of grasping the nettle. Close up, the charm vanished. She is of course a very charming and beautiful girl but, after the first hour, I could only see how she was not "Diantha, the friendly one." And then you came through the hedge in the early morning, and I was so glad, and thought we were the best of friends—

I can not believe that there was really "little hope," and yet I am sick with fright. If the infernal caribou would only turn south and let me race home! Twenty times a day I plan to bolt, but I suppose it is my soldier training that won't let me. I have to put this thing through. Wait for me. You are a good soldier, Diantha. You will have won your fight. Don't trouble about anything else—wait till I come. I can make you love me—I can do anything on earth, if only you are still there. I love you. MARK.

In all Diantha's world, there were only herself and her lover. She knelt beside him on the blankets

by the moss fire, and felt herself, body and soul, gathered into his life. The vision was so real that the opening of her door could not instantly dispel it. She stared without recognition at Sylvia's white, rigid face. Sylvia spoke, harshly.

"Why has Mark Wendell written to you?"

Diantha came back to the present with a painful shock. Her eyes fell to the sheets in her hands.

"Because he loves me, Sylvy," she said, faintly.

"He loves *you?*"

"Yes."

Sylvia looked dangerous, but kept her voice even. "Why did n't you tell me?"

"I did n't know. I thought it was—you. That I was the friend. I 'm sorry. But I 'm horribly happy." And Diantha began to cry. Sylvia turned away, then paused.

"But he has n't seen you since—Di, you are crazy!" she flung out.

Diantha mutely offered the letter, but the sight of it was enough. Sylvia went away in silence.

When, at last, Diantha came out, she found that her twin had gone to town.

"She called up your Aunt Eleanor and asked if she might stay a week or two," Mrs. Brooke explained worriedly. "She did n't seem at all like herself. I am sure something is making her unhappy."

Diantha buried her face in her mother's shoulder. "Ah, Mother, everybody has to be unhappy sometimes," she pleaded.

The blue brick house next door began to look inhabited. Delivery wagons clattered in and out of the grounds, Mark's upstairs suite was scrubbed, aired and renovated with loving ardor. Border charged through every opening door, mad with expectation. Diantha watched it all from behind her curtains, but would not be seen. She had her gift for Mark, and no hint of it should forestall the exquisite moment of giving. He had wanted her as she was—therein lay the perfection of her happiness; and there were moments when she wished that the old Diantha awaited him, that he might stand

by his splendid acceptance of her. But in her more earthy hours she rejoiced in her new loveliness, and could scarcely wait for the moment when it should burst upon him. The day was painfully slow in coming, but at last it dawned.

"I am waiting for you, Mark," she wrote; then paused, smiling to herself. "But you will find me very much changed," she added; "my hair is quite gray."

She sent the note to his house, and spent the afternoon in making herself and her home as beautiful as possible. In the early twilight she heard the motor's return next door and Border's yelps of joy, voices and opening doors, and a few moments later a note was brought her.

"I don't care what color it is," the beloved writing said. "I am coming the first moment I can get away."

Diantha piled up her fire and tried not to watch the lawn.

"It will be hours yet," she assured herself but, half an hour later, the doorbell rang.

He entered impetuously, then paused, the length of the drawing-room between them.

"I thought—" he began.

Diantha stood by the hearth, waiting. He came slowly down the long room, looking so bewildered that at last, when he reached the hearth rug, she had to smile.

"I told you I had changed," she said, putting out her hands.

"Diantha!" But he could not believe. He took her hands mechanically, then let them go. "Of course, it is Diantha," he repeated. His constraint frightened her.

"I said my hair was gray," she faltered.

"Yes, so you did." He took the chair she indicated, and picked up the poker. "It is good to get back to a fire," he said.

Diantha sat opposite him, her troubled eyes on his averted face. It was very brown. He looked thin and hard, and so worn that she had to remember his journey.

"We have been anxious about you," she said, find-

ing the silence unbearable. "We expected you long ago."

"Yes. We lost our dogs. Then one of the guides had a bad accident. Everything went against us." He spoke absently, and stole a quick glance at her. "There were letters waiting for me at the Fort, so I knew there that you were all right," he added. "Did you get my letter?"

She nodded. "The day your telegram came."

Again there seemed to be nothing to say between them. The scene was not going at all as she had planned. Mark took liberties with the fire, and Diantha drooped under a hideous sense of disappointment.

"You are really well?" He stole another glance, then looked away.

"Perfectly well," said Diantha, miserably wondering how soon he would find that he must go.

"That 's good," said Mark, and again the clammy silence enveloped them. Diantha struggled against it, but words would not come. Mark was laying down the poker, and the need to keep him at any

cost drove her to some fumbling inanity of speech. But before it was half uttered, help came from without. A long, doleful howl shattered the stillness. It rose, quavered, took a heart-rending double note, and sank away. Mark started up.

"It is that bad dog," he said.

"Oh, let him in," Diantha exclaimed, suddenly relaxed and relieved, ready to laugh in her gratitude.

"But I told him to go home," he objected.

"Ah, just this once," she pleaded. "He could n't help coming, Mark!" Their eyes met, and the flash of a smile passed between them. He came back trying to disapprove, a rapturous little dog at his side.

"You know, he will be howling out there rather often," he warned, leaning on the mantelpiece to look down at her. She had a sudden vision of how this scene would repeat itself with other little beings, Mark standing for law and order, she soft-heartedly begging off for the culprit, and her eyes softened with dear and secret laughter. Border panted on the rug between them, supremely pleased with his

achievement, and the misery of constraint was over.

"Did you know that I nursed this little wretch through a bad attack?"

"Why, they told me it was Sylvia!"

"They did?" She smiled to herself. "Did you believe it?" she added.

"Well, it did sound more like my Diantha."

"Good old Di," she commented and held up a hand. "Don't you like me this way?" she asked. He bent his face to the hand.

"I 'm stunned," he murmured. "I don't know you. I 'm—shy of you, Diantha!" They laughed at that.

"It 's only Di," she reassured him.

"But Di so transformed—" He was not afraid to look at her now. He even tried to scold. "I told you I did n't like beauties."

"But I am just the same," she protested. "I thought, at first, that I need n't be so sensible—my dear, I did want to try being spoiled. But it was

no use. I began too late. They would n't spoil me."

He drew up a stool beside her chair. "They could n't," he said, folding her hand between his.

"You will do it yourself," she warned him with a laugh. Then she bent nearer, drawn by the summons of his hand on hers. "I won't let you," she promised. "Don't be afraid. I will wait at the foot of the mountain—I won't mind the stones under the blanket. Mark, you know you 're glad!"

XII

SPRING held back, then came with a lavish rush, heaping the old place with bloom. The twins' birthday party this year was to be Diantha's wedding, with the dance afterwards, and the lanterns in the garden, and the old friends, just as it had always been. Sylvia had planned everything, vetoing Diantha's idea of a quiet, uncelebrated marriage, and serenely assuming that her place was beside her twin as maid of honor. She had spent the early spring in Egypt with Aunt Eleanor, coming back a little quieter and older, but outwardly very much herself. Diantha had expected that she would find excuses to be away until the wedding, but Sylvia had stayed at home and taken active charge. She saw Mark daily, but apparently without interest. Diantha had to accept the obvious fact that Sylvia was "all right" again, and tried to believe her happy; but her own happiness carried a shadow.

Wistaria was dripping on the veranda and the days were full of preparation, the air charged with feeling. In the tired evenings, Mrs. Brooke read aloud Jane Austen until Diantha could not bear it and begged for something new. The old deprived life was taking on a sunset glow, and her heart ached over the past, even while it rejoiced for what was coming.

Sylvia took a businesslike interest in the presents.

"Here 's another," she announced from the doorway. "Jewelry, I should say." Diantha, who was embroidering a forty-seventh "D. B.," looked interestedly at the square box with its red seals.

"Find the card, but don't let me see the present," she said. "I 'll save it till Mark comes." She kept her eyes firmly lowered as the papers were rustled.

"It is stunning," Sylvia tempted her. "You could n't wait, if you knew. But I can't find the—" She paused, then went on in an altered tone, "The card is in a sealed envelope, but it is Conrad's writing."

"Oh, all right; we won't open it," Diantha said

hastily, a faint color rising in her cheeks. Sylvia retied the box in silence, putting it with others that were awaiting Mark. Then she picked up one of the towels, looking absently at the monogram.

"You are energetic," she said; but her real thought came out a moment later: "Conrad has always been very fond of you."

"I have always loved him dearly;" Diantha tried to speak naturally over a guilty fright. Not for all the world would she have let Sylvia know what had happened in California.

"He is evidently back from abroad," Sylvia went on, turning to the window. Diantha felt a nervous need to get away from the subject.

"What shall you do this summer?" she asked, when the silence had justified the change.

"Oh, the same old things, I suppose." Sylvia yawned. "What else can one do?" It was not uncheerfully spoken, but it hurt Diantha into making a gentle attempt to cross the barrier of silence.

"Ah, my dear, I wish you could have what you want!"

"You don't know what I want," was the sharp answer.

"No. But whatever it is, I wish you could have it."

Sylvia stared down into the garden, glowing with color and sunlight. Diantha felt the truth coming and waited, breathlessly still. Suddenly her twin turned.

"I want Conrad!" she cried. "I miss him so—no one ever gave me what he did. I am at home with Conrad. I did n't know—and now it is too late. But I can't help it. I miss him so horribly! I want Conrad!" Her eyes filled and she ran away, leaving her sister dazed, and miserable with fresh guilt.

"But he did n't really care for me," Diantha persisted. "It was always Sylvia. If he could see her —if they could be thrown together—"

The idea haunted her. She was afraid to interfere, yet afraid not to. She opened his box, disclosing a wonderful little crown of diamonds; but the message with it was only merry and affectionate. "To Queen Louise of Prussia, from her devoted

ward-mate, Rothschild," it read, and underneath was written, "May she ever remain incurable!" Diantha wrote her gratitude with a relieved rush, then added a casual, "Come out and let me thank you again."

"That is all I will do," she vowed, as she posted the letter.

The next day dawned in unseasonable heat. By ten o'clock a midsummer languor lay over the garden, and blinds were closed to keep the house cool. Some gowns came home for Diantha, and she tried them on before the long mirror in the drawing-room, while Sylvia, stretched out in a wicker chair, protested at her energy.

"I will hook you if you come here, but I will not stand up or admire," she declared. Diantha laughed.

"Oh, I can fasten all these myself," she said. "I know Mark better than that!"

"But you will have a maid," Sylvia objected.

"Not on the trail, my dear. Not while we are traveling."

Sylvia frowned at the prospect. "I don't envy you," she said with dry sincerity.

"No. It would n't do for you," Diantha assented, turning before the glass. Then a sound outside made her glance through the bars of the shutters. She drew back a frightened step. "Sylvia, some one is coming," she exclaimed. "Don't let them in here—please go and see to it."

"You could escape the back way," Sylvia said, but she dragged herself up and went out into the hall. Diantha, listening with a beating heart, heard a quick, "Conrad!"

The answer brought a mighty relief. It was only, "Sylvia dear!" but it was the old tone, the old Conrad. Through the slanting shutters she could see them, Conrad at the foot of the steps, Sylvia above him, her hands in his. He was looking intently into her face.

"Why, you 're glad to see me!" he said slowly. She nodded. "You are even very glad," he went on. "Sylvia, I accuse you of being perfectly delighted."

"Well, what if I am?" returned Sylvia.

"What of it, indeed!" He put together the hands he still held. "It is no use, my dear. I had better go away. If I don't you will presently have to refuse me again."

She came down a step. "I don't mind," she said.

"Very well, then. Come to the old spot." He ventured an arm about her, and they went down the lawn together in the direction of the rose arbor.

Diantha, utterly happy, was hidden in her own room when they emerged hours later. Sylvia came straight to find her. Her strong, awakened look from the doorway made Diantha uneasy.

"Well?" she asked, trying to smile.

Sylvia still stared as though she had never before seen her twin. "Yes, it is all right," she said at last. "Di, he has told me everything."

Poor Diantha flushed crimson. "But, Sylvy, he did n't mean it! It was just that I—"

Sylvia checked her passionate explanation. "Yes, I know. He told me what you said. And he believes it now himself—that it was only a mis-

take. He always will. But, if you ask me," again her awakened eyes seemed to take the other's measure, "I should call it a gleam of common-sense. Mark is here," she added, putting out her hand, and they went down together.

THE END